

The Fourth Sunday of Easter. The scripture text is taken from John 10:1-10

We live in a nation of diversity. There are people who live in our country, who are of diverse backgrounds, faith traditions, languages, and customs that some of us are not accustomed to.

In the midst of this diversity, and cultural differences, believers realize there is only one way to heaven. We know some of those Scripture verses that remind us of this fact.

In the Gospel of John, chapter 14, verse 6, Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Later on, the writer of the Book of Acts, pens these words as they were put in prison, and let out, they reminded the people that (this is chapter 4, verse 12). "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

Time and time again, the Lord reminds us, that it is only through Him, through Christ alone, that there is forgiveness of sins and salvation.

Yet, as we look at the other religions of the world, they often try to point people in different directions, claiming that they too will lead believers to heaven, but the problem is, one has to earn his or her salvation, and still there is no guarantee that one will enter heaven after he or she passes from life into death.

On this fourth Sunday of Easter, in our gospel narrative for today, the Lord reminds us again, that He is the way of salvation, He is the "good shepherd".

In these ten verses, Jesus is the door or gate for our salvation. No matter what the other religions of the world out there say, that Jesus is, "one of the many ways to God", No, He is the "only way to God", there is no other way.

The words of Jesus in this chapter of John's Gospel, were spoken to the disciples, and they were also spoken to the religious leaders of Jesus' day.

They were described here by Jesus in the very first verse. Starting with verse 1, Jesus said: "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate, but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit."

When Jesus lived in our world, when He walked on this earth, in the culture of First Century Palestine, Jesus was a Jew, He was well versed in the Torah. Jesus was in communion with His heavenly Father, following His will, not the will of the Pharisees or the religious leaders, and all of their prescribed rules, regulations and rituals.

When Jesus went to the Temple in Jerusalem, Jesus told the scribes and the Pharisees that they were making the Lord's religion, a religion of rules taught by men. Their religious leaders were nothing more than thieves, trying to steal salvation from God's people.

Jesus said, this is verse 7: "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate, whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture."

The true sheep of God's flock were not going to listen to the Scribes and Pharisees. The true sheep of God's flock realized that in keeping all of God's Law was not enough to save them. After all, no one can keep all of God's Laws, no matter much one strives to do the right thing.

This beautiful description we have here, is that Jesus is concerned about His flock, and that the sheep listen to His voice. In verse 2, Jesus said: "The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. This is in verse 3, "The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."

Jesus speaks to His sheep, and His sheep listen to his voice. You and I have gathered here this morning to hear the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ speaking to us. We have gathered here in this place of worship to be reminded of the fact, that the Lord Jesus Christ is our Good Shepherd, and the Lord is our Gate.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the "only way" of salvation. Yet, what has happened throughout the years? We see that there is not one church here on earth, but there are many visible churches.

There is only one "invisible church" and that is the Holy Christian Church, or as we say in the third article of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

The holy catholic Church, that is small, "c" catholic, which means universal, this is not the "Roman Catholic Church", but the Holy Christian Church, throughout the world, that profess in faith, that Jesus Christ, is Lord and Savior.

Now there are many visible churches in our world today, with all different kinds of beliefs, with all different kinds of teachings, but sadly, some of these churches have fallen prey, to the teachings of men. For example, there some churches that believe, that there is such a thing as "universal salvation" meaning that, the Muslim, the Hindu, the Scientologist, all will enter heaven just like the Christian, because Jesus was not "the way, the truth and the life" He was just one of the ways.

In the time of Jesus, and even after Jesus' death and resurrection, there were false prophets, that came in like wolves in sheep's clothing, and leading many astray, that has been going on for centuries. Cults and heresies are nothing new under the sun.

The assurance that we have, is that the true sheep are going to listen to God's voice. They are going to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd.

They are going to listen to the voice of Christ. The writer of Mark's Gospel tells us in the last days, (this is in chapter 13, verse 22): "False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect."

Still it happens, that there are those, who are deceived. Those deceived, are not the sheep and they are not listening to God's voice. Those who follow false prophets and false messiahs, does the word, "cult" come to mind?

False prophets, false teachers, and false messiahs have, unfortunately led many away from the True Faith. These false prophets, teachers, and self-proclaimed messiahs do not listen to the voice of Jesus, they listen to the voice of the devil.

The writer of II Timothy describes the attitude of men and the attitude of our sinful nature. (This is in II Timothy chapter 4, verse 3): "For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves, teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths."

That attitude appeals to our sinful nature. Our sinful nature does not want to hear God's Law that condemns our sin.

Our sinful nature does not want to hear God's Law, that says, we deserve punishment in hell, for our sinful and rebellious nature.

We also need to hear that voice of Jesus saying: "Yes, our sins stand as condemnation for each one of us."

Because in hearing those words, we realize that we cannot save ourselves, we cannot make ourselves right in the sight of God by our own merits or achievements. In hearing those words of the law, we realize that Christ and only Christ is our Good Shepherd to save us from eternal separation from God.

Jesus is our only door of salvation. We listen to His voice that says, "Because my blood has been shed for you, on that cross your sins are forgiven." Jesus is the Door for His sheep; and we, as His sheep, listen to His voice.

Jesus' voice says to each true sheep, "Come, I have forgiven your sins." In the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Jesus says: "Come, eat my body, and drink my blood and be reminded how much I have done for you."

The Lord tells us in the Book of I John, chapter 4, verse 6, He writes: "We are from God. Whoever knows God, listens to us, and whoever is not from God, does not listen to us. From this, we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error."

The sheep listen to his voice, and what happens? He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

If we could travel back in time to First Century Palestine, and see the area in which the sheep were grazing on the hillsides, we would see that the sheep pen wasn't a very big. It was used at night as an enclosure to keep the sheep safe. The stone walls were high enough so that the sheep could not get out, and wild animals, such as predators, could not get in.

And the shepherd would place himself at the entrance of the sheep pen to protect the sheep. In the morning the shepherd would call each sheep and as the sheep hear the voice of the shepherd, he would lead the sheep out of the pen, into the pasture area so the sheep could graze, and of course at night, the shepherd would lead his sheep back into the pen for safety.

The sheep need to listen to His voice time and time again, before they are going to follow His footsteps. You and I are God's sheep, and we need to listen to His voice before we are willing to recognize Him and understand His meaning for His will in our lives, and this is done through faith.

Remember last Sunday, we heard the story of the two disciples on the road from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus.

These two disciples heard Jesus speak to them, but did not recognize Him. As they sat down to eat, Jesus spoke to them and as He broke bread with them, they recognized Him, because they were seeing the familiar things Jesus did for them, they knew it was Jesus by their faith in Him.

Jesus said, this is in verse 9, "I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

What powerful words of encouragement these were for the disciples. It did take them awhile to understand the full depth and meaning of what Jesus said to them, that they would have life, and have it to the fullest or abundantly.

Jesus spoke these words to the disciples before He was crucified on the cross, before he was laid to rest in the tomb, and resurrected.

I am sure that, on that Sunday, and the days following, they may have recalled these words, when Jesus said: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Sometimes, in our day to day living in this crazy and hectic world, we might not think that we have life to fullest, or have abundant life. It may not seem like it. For instance, the world out there says, if you aren't wealthy, how can you enjoy life? The world out there says, if you don't have your health, how can you enjoy life? The world out there says, if you don't have this or that, how can you enjoy life? The list goes on and on.

Yet the Lord says to us, as His sheep, we already have a full life, we have life to the fullest, because God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, has given us the hope and the promise of eternal life.

For in this life, no matter what we have set our sights on, be it wealth, prestige, honor, glory, power, or whatever, we will not be satisfied, nor will we have life to the fullest, because things of this world are only fleeting and will eventually turn to dust.

Instead, when we listen to Jesus' voice, we can see the things that He gives us. Then our life becomes full.

The Apostle Paul reminds us in II Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 15: "And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them."

Living life to fullest means for us, is that, we who are in Christ, can face the troubles of this world, the troubles of this life, knowing that there is more to this life, than just being born, struggling to survive and dying. Because of what God in Christ has done for us, we can still rejoice and be thankful, for all that God has done for us.

We will not follow Jesus all the way to the cross and die that death that He did, because He already did that for us.

Jesus' footsteps took Him to the cross. Jesus' footsteps took Him to the tomb as an innocent victim, so that we will never have to face such torture. But we still have our crosses to bear in our day to day lives.

But the Lord says to us: “Hear my voice, follow my foot-steps, because you will have life, abundant life, and life to the fullest, because we follow in faith, by God’s grace, the Lord Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life, and He will lead us to our heavenly home. Amen.

Let us pray:

Lord God, Your Son Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd. By your grace through faith in Him, we have promise of abundant life, eternal life with Him, and that will never be taken away. Be with us in our day to day lives, as live out our faith, so that others may see Christ in us. All these things we humbly pray in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.