

Introductory`

John 10: 11-16 is the text for Easter 2 in the TLH one-year series. LW has readings from John 10 on every Easter 4; 1-10 in Series A, 11-18 in Series B, and 22-30 in Series C, and LSB has continued with those same readings. The Good Shepherd focus in TLH was on five verses one Sunday. The three-year lectionary does the whole chapter in three years.

When preaching on these texts throughout the three-year cycle, it would be a good idea to hit some of the basics each year and then to focus on the particulars in the texts for each individual year. These include; Jesus is the Good Shepherd, there are bad shepherds, wolves who often look like sheep, and the Pastor is the imperfect Shepherd Under Christ.

There is perhaps no topic more awkward for the Pastor to talk about than the pastoral office. If it makes the flock a little bit uncomfortable, it makes the shepherd very uncomfortable. Some pastors find it to be so uncomfortable to talk about, that they just don't, and then commotion happens, and they find themselves having to talk about it.

That's extremely awkward. Having been an actual regularly called parish pastor for many years, I get that it is much less awkward for The Vacancy Pastor or The Installation Preacher to broach the subject, and I always do when doing that, but unless you happen to be one of those things this Sunday, you will be addressing the Sheep as their Shepherd.

The *Document of Vocation* may be a good place to start with in talking about the duties of the Shepherd and the sheep. One of my tasks as Vacancy Guy was always to help get the congregation ready for their new pastor. Congregations who are getting a candidate may well need special preparation to be ready to greet their newly ordained Pastor.

I would go through the Document in Adult Bible Class, and I will be surprised anew at how little most Lutherans know about what they are binding the pastor to do – and what they are *not* binding him to do – and what they are binding themselves – and *not* binding themselves – to do. In many ways the shepherd/sheep relationship is not complicated.

We are dealing here with not so much a rather extended metaphor, but a series of metaphors (Jesus calls it “παροιμίαν”) about sheep and shepherds, and as we have talked about before, most Americans don't know a sheep from a raccoon. They have a vague idea that wool comes from sheep, but they wear mostly cotton and polyester blends.

They also know that some people actually eat lamb, but they also know that those people do not live in Iowa. And most of all, they know that the OT and Jesus talk a lot about

sheep and shepherds. In fact, most of their knowledge about sheep and shepherds has come while they have been at Sunday School and church, a lot of it on this Sunday.

The immediate context of this incident is immediately after The Healing of the Man Born Blind, which you may recognize as the reading we had on Lent 4A. That incident ends with Jesus taking a pretty good shot at the Pharisees, pronouncing judgment on them, calling them blind, and declaring that because of that blindness their guilt remains.

He now seems to be setting Himself up as an alternative to these bad shepherds, to whom He has just spoken, about whom He will soon speak, speaking of Himself as the good shepherd. One only has to look as far as the well-known Psalm 23 to see that the concept of religious leader as shepherd is not new with Jesus. He uses that imagery frequently.

He laments that His People are “like sheep without a shepherd,” telling the Apostles to go to “the lost sheep of Israel,” talking about how the shepherd will leave the ninety-nine and go to look for the one who is lost. For other occurrences of Jesus talking about sheep and shepherds, an English concordance search of those words will suffice, and Barclay.

His *The Daily Bible Series* can be had online and hard-copy dirt cheap. The Commentary is like the Internet, and the Pastor and Theologian has to use discretion and do a lot of sifting through a lot of things. Barclay has a handle on 1st Century Palestine and he knows his bible. His quoting of OT and description of middle eastern shepherds is good.

People will generally not be able to articulate it, but they will know when we’re using a figure of speech. Without thinking about it, they also use figures all the time. When we look at this metaphor, for example, they can see that they have no wool and seldom go “baah,” and they know that you don’t know the first thing about tending those critters.

It’s important to constantly be proclaiming and educating people about what is actually going on at church on Sunday morning. There is a cultural tendency to trivialize the sacred and magnify the common. Divine Service in the sanctuary is the sheep gathered in the sheep fold, tucked safely away, protected from the harm and danger that’s out there.

Textual Notes

About Sheep and Shepherds

One of the problems encountered in this scholarly quest to understand these ovine metaphors is the same problem that you would run into if you talked about American cattle and cattlemen; a lot depends on who, what, and when you’re talking about. Not all things bovine are the same in this country. There is even more variety if you go global.

Out here at the ranch, the cows used to eat grass in lush forty acre pastures and on yonder hill during the summer. In the fall they would move to my front yard, and then in the winter they ate hay and grain, all the time fenced in. Generally, that's life for most cattle around these parts. Then they make their way to the place where they are made into beef.

The cows in Marlboro Country eat grass in very large, semi-arid, open areas. In winter, they are fed large bales of hay, and in the spring, they are rounded up and turned loose again. In places like Garden City, KS and Greeley, CO, the cows never see open space or a single blade of grass, but they see plenty of grain and stuff, and then they become beef.

The model that Jesus has in mind here is the one where the sheep are in pasture during the day at certain times of the year, and at night they are brought into the sheepfold. The primary purpose of the sheepfold is to protect the sheep from predators. The model has the sheepfold being shared by different shepherds, all with their individual flocks.

The task of the first-century Palestinian shepherd was to find good grazing land – which was hard to come by – and water, to lead the sheep there, to keep individual sheep from straying into danger, to protect the sheep from predators, to get the sheep into the sheep fold at night, and to lead them out of the sheep fold and into pasture the next day.

The fold was an enclosure made of stone, not wood. We spent a week in Ireland a few of years ago, and I don't think I ever saw one single wood fence, but every single two-lane road was bordered by a stone wall on either side, and every single field was fenced by a wall made of stone. As a general rule, you use what is at hand to build a fence et al.

In Illinois, in the time of Abe Lincoln, famous then as a rail splitter, they famously used wood to build fences because there was a lot of it. The first settlers in Nebraska built their houses of sod because sod was there. So, in first century Palestine, where stone was abundant, precious trees would not have been used to make enclosures for livestock.

In the Burren especially, of which the Englishman Edmund Ludlow said, "*It is a country where there is not enough water to drown a man, wood enough to hang one, nor earth enough to bury him,*" the stone wall is omnipresent. As we traveled down a one-lane road in the Burren, we wondered what would happen if we met another car. We didn't.

It was also the task of one of the shepherds to control the opening into and out of the sheepfold. This one of them would do by placing himself prone, lying down across the opening to the fold, becoming the gate. The good shepherd should also be willing to sacrifice his own life for the protection of the sheep, which was sometimes required.

1. He talks about “ὁ μὴ εἰσερχόμενος διὰ τῆς θύρας εἰς τὴν αὐλήν - one entering not through the opening into the fold.” We recall from John 20 that θύρας means “opening.” There, the word was used to refer to a door or a window. Here that same word is used for that opening in the sheep enclosure across which the shepherd has stretched himself.

Rather than coming in through the front door, “ἀλλὰ ἀναβαίνων ἀλλαχόθεν, ἐκεῖνος κλέπτης ἐστὶν καὶ ληστής – but climbs in another way is a thief and a robber.” This seems to be a reference to human predators. Their plan for the sheep is given later on, when He explains that they want to “steal” in order to “kill and destroy” the sheep

If somebody comes into my house using the front door, I’m probably going to be good with them being in my house, and likely I have allowed them in. But if they come in by another way, not so much. In fact, we are probably going to make certain assumptions should we see a person crawling through a window into the house, especially at night.

Afraid of the Dark on *The History Channel* talks about nighttime in the time before artificial light was so very commonplace. The shepherd is not carrying a flashlight. The thief and robber would have the advantage of concealment by darkness. The sheep are in constant danger from them, as well as from other predators, of which He will speak later.

2. Contrast that with the one who enters “διὰ τῆς θύρας – through the opening.” That one is called “ποιμὴν ἐστὶν τῶν προβάτων – a shepherd of the sheep.” The indefinite article indicates more than one shepherd, while the definite article indicates that the sheep are one group. The NASB and NAS translations pick up on that; but the rest do not.

The sheep have been grazing during the day in presumably communal pastures, and when night draws near, they bring their sheep to the fold. Rather than each shepherd building his own fold, they used a common fold. The result was not only fewer, but bigger folds, but many larger folds could be built to facilitate movement to other faraway pastures.

3. The person who lays across the opening is called “ὁ θυρωρὸς – opening guard.” The θυρωρὸς is the bouncer of the establishment; he decides who gets in, and he decides who is not allowed into the fold. He also personally knows all the other shepherds, and when they come in the morning, ὁ θυρωρὸς allows him into the fold to fetch his sheep, or not.

The Pastor of the congregation is the gatekeeper to the Sacrament. That’s why – if you have assistance with distribution – the Pastor should be the one who handles the host. He is obligated and responsible by means of his Call to decide who receives the Sacrament or not. The assistant – if you have such a thing, like I do – follows the lead of the Pastor.

When the individual shepherds come to get their individual sheep, “τὰ ἴδια πρόβατα – his own sheep,” the sheep recognize the voice of their own shepherd, and they follow him out to green pastures. He also “φωνεῖ κατ’ ὄνομα – calls them by name,” and to the shepherd, each of the flock is an individual, and it’s not uncommon to give them names.

Keep in mind that the main purpose of sheep at that time was for wool and milk. If you ever get up to Tuscany, make sure to score some Pecorino Toscano cheese, made from sheep milk, and you can’t get it around here. No, no, no, not Pecorino Romano, which you can get around here. The Internet sells Pecorino Toscano, but it’s kind of pricey.

They tell me that sheep don't like to be milked, but they do what they have to do. We've all seen enough sheep being sheered on TV and in the movies – I think Gordon Ramsey once sheered a sheep on TV – to discern that sheep are not really fond of the practice. Wool, from which to make clothing and tents and things was the function of sheep.

The man on the north side of the Lincoln Highway just west of Grand Mound is offering grass-fed lambs for sale, most of which will likely become lamb chops and the like. Cotton and chemistry-created cloth have replaced wool, and cow's and a multitude of other, plant-based milk is common, and sheep don't like to be milked. So they tell me.

I drink goat milk.

4. When my dog hears my voice, or the voice of a family member, he knows our voices. Barclay talks extensively and knowingly about Palestinian sheep and the voice of their own shepherd, and when they hear a voice not of the shepherd once, they stop what they're doing and look around. When they hear that same sound again, they run away.

The Christian knows the voice of Jesus speaking to Him and will not follow another. He will listen to the one who has been placed as the Under Shepherd of Jesus, his pastor. How much, in what circumstances that will happen, and how easily it will happen, depends on that flock and that Pastor. Not all shepherds and not all flocks are the same.

Jesus describes how He goes in front of the sheep, and “τὰ πρόβατα αὐτῷ ἀκολουθεῖ, ὅτι οἶδασιν τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ - the sheep follow Him because they know His voice.” You can read descriptions of this in books. You can talk about children, dogs, and Jesus in your sermon to help people better understand the concept. Or the Recess Lady at lunch.

5. Conversely, the sheep “οὐ μὴ ἀκολουθήσουσιν, ἀλλὰ φεύξονται ἀπ' αὐτοῦ – will not ever follow the stranger but will instead flee from him,” like Barclay says. We note the double negative – the first two words in the quotation – which do not cancel each other out, but which serve instead to intensify that there is no possibility of that happening.

There's a reason why the sheep don't follow the one who is not the shepherd, “ὅτι οὐκ οἶδασιν τῶν ἀλλοτρίων τὴν φωνήν – because they don't know the stranger's voice.” If somebody other than his owner says his name and call him, the dogs ears might perk up, but that's all he'll do. With sheep, when they hear a human, it's either/or, come or run.

6. John points out that Jesus is speaking to the hearers by means of “παροιμίαν.” This word occurs in the NT here and in John 16, and in Second Peter. Looking at those three occurrences, MM and BAG, it seems to be a general term for “figure of speech.” See Bullinger's tome to see how often God uses figures in speaking to us in the Bible.

We noted here previously that Jesus is using the specific figure known as metaphor, a comparison *not* using the word “like” or “as.” (A simile is a comparison that *does* use the word “like” or “as.”) The Ancients, God, and Jesus, who is God, use Figures of Speech constantly. It makes what is being said more listenable and helps us to better understand.

When John says that Jesus is speaking to them in figures “ἐκεῖνοι δὲ οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τίνα ἦν ἃ ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς – yet they still did not know what He was saying to them,” John is not saying that they could not understand Jesus *because* He used a figure of speech. What John is saying is that Jesus is using a figure – like He should – but they *still don’t get it*.

Jesus is doing what a good speaker is supposed to do, something that He, and He and other good speakers do it all the time, and yet these men still did not understand. So it is that John, who was there, tells us that the listeners did not understand. How does John, who was there, and also Jesus, who was also there, know that they did not understand?

Probably the same way that we know when they’re not tracking; mostly body language. There is no language that speaks more loudly or clearly or accurately than body language. In this case, maybe the listeners had that glazed look, the one somewhere between deer-in-the-headlights and been-watching-TV-for-four-hours look. Maybe they turned away.

Maybe they started to look at their bulletins, or whispering to their spouse, or started to just fidget. What does Jesus do when the listener doesn’t understand the metaphor? He explains it, bringing it down to a level that they can understand. Good preaching does that, as does good teaching, where listeners are allowed to verbalize non-comprehension,

We need to speak to our audience, and in my experience most pastors need to bring it down a couple of notches. The challenge is to have something for the three-year-old and to have something as well for the pastor or, even worse, seminary professor who is visiting. Begin with a children’s sermon – preached from the pulpit – and go from there.

7. When it says that “Εἶπεν οὖν πάλιν ὁ Ἰησοῦς – Jesus spoke to them again,” it may well mean that he repeated the metaphor to them. It is noteworthy that Jesus here calls Himself “θύρα τῶν προβάτων – the opening of the sheep.” He will later call Himself “the way, the truth, and the life,” and shortly He will call Himself “the good shepherd.”

Well, which one is it? Well, all of them, of course. Whatever you want to talk about, there is no limit to the number or the kinds of figures of speech you can use to talk about that thing. The art of sermon writing – or any kind of writing, as far as that goes – is to use the right kind and number of figures to communicate without it sounding cluttered.

He does not use the word “ὁ θυρωρὸς – opening guard,” but “θύρα – opening,” which He will shortly (9) again call Himself. That metaphor makes Him the opening through which one must enter to join the other sheep in the fold. The two metaphors use the same sheep and shepherd setting to make different points, and it’s okay for you to do that.

8. He returns to the metaphor from earlier – clarifying what He means by that; “πάντες ὅσοι ἦλθον πρὸ ἐμοῦ κλέπται εἰσὶν καὶ λησταί – all who came before me are thieves and robbers.” They did not come in through Him, the opening, but climbed over the wall at night, “ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἤκουσαν αὐτῶν τὰ πρόβατα – but the sheep did not listen to them.”

9. More clarification, “ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ θύρ – I am the opening.” The last time Jesus had said, “ἐγὼ εἰμι – I am,” was at the end of the contentious eighth chapter of this book, and John tells us that “the Jews” had picked up stones and were fixin to stone Him. They were fixin to stone Him because that’s what you did to somebody who called Himself “God.”

This time, when Jesus says “ἐγὼ εἰμι,” it does not elicit that response. He goes on to say, “ἐγὼ εἰμι” several more times, and still no response, except that “there was a division among the Jews because of these words,” (v. 19). The term “these words,” refers to the entire sermon, not just the “ἐγὼ εἰμι,” but ἐγὼ εἰμις are included in the “these words.”

A conditional sentence, “δι’ ἐμοῦ ἐάν τις εἰσέλθῃ, σωθήσεται – if anybody enter in through me, He will be saved.” The future “will be saved” is in the passive voice, God is doing the saving, we are the ones being saved, and “εἰσελεύσεται καὶ ἐξελεύσεται καὶ νομὴν εὐρήσει – you will go out, and find pasture,” the sustaining Word and Sacraments.

10. About the thief, “οὐκ ἔρχεται εἰ μὴ ἵνα κλέψῃ καὶ θύσῃ καὶ ἀπολέσῃ – he does not come except to steal and kill and destroy.” Exception clause; there’s only one reason why the thief comes around – and they are not good – expressed by three subjunctive verbs; to steal, to kill – the word is often used for sacrifice – or to destroy, by consuming.

In contrast, “ἐγὼ ἦλθον ἵνα ζωὴν ἔχωσιν καὶ περισσὸν ἔχωσιν – I came so that they might have life, and in abundance.” The verb is simple aorist, followed by a purpose clause; this is the purpose of Jesus coming into the world; to give us life. The word “ζωὴν – life” is the word for all of life, not physical life only (βίος). To be a Christian is a good thing.

Having said that, let’s not get carried away with this thing. I say that because the Health and Wealth people do. That adjective “περισσὸν – abundantly” means “beyond what is anticipated, exceeding expectation,” and it must surely be talking about heaven. Having said that, this life may also bring things that are better than we ever thought could be.

Law/Gospel

No Opening/Yes Opening – Because of sin, the opening into the sheepfold is closed, and we are on our own to deal with the thieves and other predators. Because of Jesus our Good Shepherd, the way has been opened to us, and we have sanctuary from the thieves and other predators.

Sermon Titles

About Sheep and Shepherds

Good Shepherds Are Hard to Find

Shepherds, Sheep, and Robbers

Hymns

I am Jesus' Little Lamb – LSB 740

Shepherd of Tender Youth – LSB 864

The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want – LSB 710

The King of Love My Shepherd Is – LSB 709

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us – LSB 711

Sing Easter hymns during the Easter Season

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, Iowa

Resources

ACC – Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Matthew)*.
Intervarsity Press, 2002

BAG – Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated by
William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1979

BCLY – William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*. The Westminster Press, 1975

FGG – James W. Voelz, *Fundamental Greek Grammar*. Concordia Publishing House,
1993

GBS – Jeffrey Gibbs, *Concordia Commentary, Matthew*, CPH, 2006

GND – Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*,
Eerdmans, 1982

MGM – W.F. Moulton, A.S. Geden, H.K. Moulton, *A Concordance to the Greek
Testament*. T & T Clark LTD., 1978

MM – James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek
Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982

ODCC – F.L. Cross, Editor, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford University Press, 1978

RNK – Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, 1976

RSV – Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, 1965

SCR – David Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church*, CPH, 2004

UBD – Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, 1977.

WP – A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Baker, 1930

VINE – W.E.Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984

WIK – www.wikipedia.com

BIB – www.biblos.com

GBO – www.greekbible.com

Digital Classics Library - www.perseus.tufts.edu

Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html