

## **“False and True Shepherds”**

(John 10:1-10 – Easter 4 – April 26, 2026)

John 10:1-10 – <sup>1</sup>“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup>But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” <sup>6</sup>Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them. <sup>7</sup>Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. <sup>9</sup>I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

Dear sheep of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who laid down His life to save us:

In Jesus’ day, when shepherds brought their sheep in from the fields for the night, they would lead them into a pen. It had no roof, but its stone walls were high enough to keep the sheep in and dangerous predators out. The sheep came in through the door, which was guarded by a doorkeeper. In the morning, the shepherd called his sheep by name and led them out through the door to pasture. They knew his voice and followed him.

Jesus uses this illustration of the sheepfold to picture His Church. The sheep are all believers. As Jesus goes on to say, He is the Good Shepherd who gave His life for us, to win our salvation and eternal life. A distinguishing mark of His sheep is that we know Him by faith and follow Him (vs. 11, 14, 28). As our Good Shepherd, Jesus continues to watch over us, protect us from evil, provide for us, and nourish our faith unto eternal life. He does this by leading us in the green pastures of His life-giving Word, His saving truth.

For this purpose, Jesus calls and sends undershepherds to serve as pastors and teachers. As they faithfully preach and teach His Word, His sheep are actually hearing His voice. By His Word and the Holy Spirit’s work in it, His sheep are given faith and eternal life. But as Jesus warns, there are also false shepherds whom He does not send. As He teaches in this illustration, His sheep can distinguish between **“False and True Shepherds.”**

### **1) The false shepherds**

He begins by describing the contrast: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep” (vs. 1-2).

False shepherds try to enter the sheepfold, Jesus' Church. But instead of entering by the door, they climb in some other sly way for their own evil purpose. What is the door they are avoiding? It is Jesus Himself, as He says: *"I am the door of the sheep.... If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture"* (vs. 7, 9).

Jesus is the one way to be saved. We enter His sheepfold only through faith in Him. On our own, all we like sheep have gone astray in our own sinful ways (Isaiah 53:6). But the Good Shepherd came to seek and save lost sheep (Matthew 15:24). To win us back as His sheep, He gave His life on the cross; as 1 Peter 2:24-25 says: *"Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."* By God's grace, we have been saved. By His Holy Spirit, He has called us to repentance and faith in His Son. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has found us and brought us home, through the door as His own sheep.

False shepherds do not enter by the door through faith in Jesus. They do not enter in His truth, but they speak falsehood by which they would mislead and harm the sheep. As Jesus warns: *"All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers.... The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy"* (vs. 8, 10). By their lies, they would steal sheep away from Jesus. They would kill and destroy saving faith.

As Jesus spoke these words, the Pharisees and teachers of the Law were leading sheep away the Good Shepherd. They taught that salvation must be earned by obedience to God's commandments, as well as many religious traditions they themselves had added. So they were pointing sinners to their own works and righteousness to be saved, instead of pointing to the work of Jesus as the Savior of sinners. Jesus told such false shepherds: *"Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered"* (Luke 11:52).

Today, many false shepherds do enter the door by faith in Jesus; and they hinder those who would. Jesus says: *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves"* (Matthew 7:15). Such false shepherds may imitate the Good Shepherd's voice, using Jesus' name, preaching about following His example in love and good works. But they do not point sinners to His saving work alone.

On the one hand, their preaching may focus on your life of obedience to God's Commands and the proof of your devotion – by your good works and sacrifices in His service, your tithing, your fasting, your prayers. By their focus on the Law and the holy life you must live for God, they do not rightly preach the Gospel. They do not point failing sinners to Christ alone, and the sacrifice He made on the cross to save us from our sin. They do not point to His holy life of obedience which alone counts for our righteousness. False shepherds lead many unsuspecting sheep to think they are in God's favor by their

life of obedience and good works. But Galatians 5:4 warns: *“You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”*

On the other hand, false shepherds may preach a false kind of freedom in Jesus’ name, by leading sheep through different doors into pastures that please the sinful nature. Instead of using God’s Law to call sinners to repentance, they downplay sin. They call it mistakes in judgment, things people need to work on; or even alternate lifestyles or paths to heaven. They say a loving God would not condemn anyone to hell. Therefore, they do not preach the true Gospel. They do not point penitent sinners to the only Savior, who was crucified to pay the great price to save us from sin, death, and hell. Such false prophets are like those God took to task in Jeremiah’s day, who were leading sheep to feel secure in their own sinful ways: *“saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ when there is no peace”* (Jeremiah 6:14).

False shepherds, who do enter by the door, *“do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple”* (Romans 16:18). They preach what pays, what itching ears of the world want to hear. They serve the devil. The father of lies speaks through them, seeking to steal sheep from the Good Shepherd, to kill and destroy saving faith and devour them in eternal death.

How do Jesus’ sheep respond to such voices? He says: *“Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers”* (vs. 5). Sheep recognize only their true shepherd’s voice. How important it is for us to know Jesus’ voice, as He leads us by His truth of Scripture. Then when we hear voices of false shepherds, who say and do what is contrary to His Word, we will flee from them. We will do as the apostle Paul says: *“I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them”* (Romans 16:17).

## **2) The true shepherds**

Now let us hear how Jesus describes true shepherds, and how His sheep respond to them: *“But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice”* (vs. 2-4).

True shepherds enter by the door. They enter through faith in Jesus and belong to His sheepfold, His Church. From His flock, the Good Shepherd calls and sends some as undershepherds to preach and teach His Word, so His sheep will hear His voice and follow Him. Faithful pastors and teachers point to Jesus alone as the Good Shepherd and Savior. They preach all that His Word says, even when it does not please itching ears of the world. They rightly preach the Law, condemning sin and calling sinners to true repentance. They rightly preach the Gospel, pointing the penitent to Christ and Him crucified as their Savior (1 Corinthians 2:2), proclaiming full forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life in His name.

As true shepherds preach Jesus' Word and guide His flock by His truth, what do the sheep receive? What do they receive, as they hear their Good Shepherd's voice? They receive His abundant blessings of salvation and eternal life. Jesus says: *"If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.... I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly"* (vs. 9, 10).

Through the faithful ministry of His undershepherds, Jesus Himself leads His flock in and out, day by day, to the green pastures and still waters of His life-giving Word, restoring our souls, strengthening our faith, leading us in the paths of righteousness (Psalm 23:2-3). In Baptism, the Good Shepherd washes His sheep from their stains of sin; though our guilt be red like blood, Jesus washes us by His blood and presents us as His sheep with clean wool, holy and without blemish (Isaiah 1:18; Ephesians 5:27). The Good Shepherd prepares a Table before us in the presence of our enemies; His cup of salvation runs over as He feeds us richly by His Body and Blood (Psalm 23:5; Matthew 26:26-28).

Already, we have life more abundantly in the care of our Good Shepherd, as we receive all His gifts of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. No more do we wander aimlessly in our own paths, lost and helpless like sheep without a shepherd – unable to provide what is good for our souls; unable to protect ourselves against the wolf, the devil; unable to escape the fangs of eternal death. Instead, our Good Shepherd, who gave His life in love for us, leads us with that same all-giving love. He who has called us to Himself by faith, calls us by name as His own. He knows all our needs of body and soul, and provides what is best for us; so we say: *"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want"* (Psalm 23:1). He knows all the dangers around us, seen and unseen, and protects us by His almighty power; so we say: *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me"* (Psalm 23:4).

As we listen to the voice of our Good Shepherd, in the faithful preaching and teaching of His Word, we have His abundant life. Jesus says: *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand"* (vs. 27-28). When this temporal life ends, He will give us life even more abundantly as He leads us to the green pastures and life-giving waters of His heavenly home. So we say: *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever"* (Psalm 23:6).

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.