

“Have life abundantly” John 10:1-10

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”

This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and 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.”

Last words which we read in our today’s Gospel reading were words of Jesus: “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” That they may have life and have it abundantly.

In the gospel according John, ‘life’ means not only life here, but eternal life as well, life that never ends, life that comes from the very source of life, from God Creator Himself.

Who wouldn’t want to have life and to have it abundantly? Here and even more in eternity. Everyone longs for it. Eternity is written on our hearts, we live this live as knowing deep inside that there is going to be a continuation. Exactly as a proverb says: “He [God] has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man’s heart.” (Ec. 3:11)

These words of Jesus, which we heard today are good news for you. Jesus came to give ‘them’ life, and in a sense ‘they’ in Jesus words applies also to you. Jesus came for you, to give life to you, true life and to give it abundantly.

Today we’ll look at these two little parables which Jesus told His listeners. One about Jesus as the true shepherd and other about Jesus as the doors to life, and we’ll try to learn what these two little parables teach us about God’s attitude towards us, to you.

First of the two parables tells about relations between shepherds and sheep. In Jesus times shepherding was different. A shepherd would call his sheep and they would recognize his voice. Then he would lead them and they would follow.

There are few marvelous things in this parable. Few verses later Jesus identifies Himself as a Good Shepherd. However, it is not just a nice metaphor, appropriate in

Middle Eastern culture, it's much more. It is the fulfillment of one of the Old Testament prophecies uttered through prophet Ezekiel.

If we want to hear this parable in all its depth we need to hear it as Jesus' listeners heard it. That is, against the background of this Old Testament prophecy. You can read it in full in Ezekiel 34, I'll read at least a part of it.

“Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? [...] The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, [...] So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts.” (Ez. 34:2-5)

“Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. [...] I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep [...] declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak [...] I will feed them in justice. (Ez. 34:11-16)

You see, it is not just a nice metaphor about the Good Shepherd. It is so much more. Jesus claims that He is the Good Shepherd. The one about whom Ezekiel prophesied. He claims that He is God of the Old Testament Himself, coming to take care of His own sheep.

And not just for the sheep of Israel, but as Jesus Himself states “I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” (John 10:16) Who are these other sheep? Do you know? You are these other sheep. He has come to be your shepherd too.

And what a shepherd He is. Just two things. First. He “calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” If you are Jesus' disciple, if you are baptized and adopted as God's child, then He is your shepherd too, and He knows your name. Your name! We know how pleasant it is when someone actually remembers our names.

Jesus, the Son of God, doesn't look to His church as simply a huge flock, no, He knows each of you individually. He knows exactly who you are. He knows all the dark sides of your heart, and He knows how wonderfully He can transform you to be the best you possible. He comes to you and says: “I created you [...] Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” (Isa 43:1)

Second. He not just knows your name, but He values you so highly that He ‘lays down his life for His sheep.’ What a commitment, what a faithfulness and steadfastness?!

He is both the Shepherd and the Rock. Whatever comes, you can be sure that He won't leave you, He won't abandon you.

Nothing can alter His promises, nothing can hinder Him from fulfilling them. If you are adopted as a child of God in the Holy Baptism, then you are His heir: His eternal Kingdom, renewed heaven and renewed earth will belong to you.

You will live and feast there together with Jesus Christ, the Son of God and all the saints who have ever walked on this earth. Be sure, this is coming and nothing can take it away from you. This much about Jesus as the Good Shepherd, as your Good Shepherd.

But then Jesus also compared Himself with the doors. True shepherds come to their sheep through the door, they don't climb over the fence. They come to you through Jesus and want to bring you through Jesus into eternal life, into abundant life.

What does this parable mean for us today? Especially, what does this mean for you today? We have quite a few warnings in this parable. "He who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber." "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy."

What is Jesus warning us against? A lots of things. Against false teacher and against false ways to salvation. This is a little bit scary, for there we come to your, yes, your responsibility. To your responsibility as members of the Church, as sheep of the Good Shepherd.

You are those who are supposed to know the voice of your true shepherd, Christ, and you are supposed to recognize also those who want to come not through the doors, but otherwise. For they come only to steal and kill and destroy. What does this mean?

In today's Gospel reading Jesus accused Israel's teachers to be thieves and robbers. We are used to think about them as about some kind of evil people, for at the end they demanded to kill Jesus.

But the truth is, that probably most of them were much better people than we are. What we know from history, those teachers of Israel took the Bible, God's words very seriously. Very seriously. They really tried hard to live up to the demands of the Old Testament laws and how they understood them.

But then, what was wrong with them? Gradually they have lost the focus of their faith. It turned it from what God does for us, to - what we do to please God.

Their begun to believe that they can enter into Kingdom of God not through the doors, through Jesus, but by simply living decent lives. Does this sound familiar? Have your heard the idea that 'all good people go to heaven'?

That's our fallen nature. We don't realize how deep is our sin. How much we rebel against God, how much we want to do our own thing, be our own creators and saviors, to be gods ourselves and not to listen true God and not to receive everything from Him.

This switch in focus has happened again and again in the history of the Church. It happens again and again with us, with teachers of God's word. It happens with every single believer.

So often we forget that the main message of Jesus is "I forgive you all your sins", and not 'be a good person and everything will be fine'. "I forgive you all your sins" - this, and nothing else is the unique message of the Church, this is our task - to proclaim forgiveness of sins, to restore relationships with God, to bestow victory over death.

We are tempted to turn our focus from what God did and does for us, from what He gives us in the Church, in the Divine Service, in His words and Sacraments, in community of His saints, to what we can do to look good in God's eyes. It is much easier to think about our relationships as bilateral deal. I'll do this, and you will do that. It doesn't work with God.

If only we realize that God sees our hearts, that He judges our thoughts, who can be that foolish as to hope that some kind of outward actions will make us pleasing to Him. What a childish naiveté. This explains why those who teach us to focus on ourselves, on what we do are called thieves and robbers.

Because they take away what God Himself gives you in Jesus Christ. For He graciously gives you a good conscience, when you know that you are forgiven, fully and totally, and accepted because of what Jesus did for you. Whatever you are, and whatever you have done. Forgiven.

God the Father gives you assurance and peace that you are His child, and nothing is going to change it. Nothing. God's give you firm and certain hope, that all His generous promises apply to you, forgiveness, salvation, eternal life, abundantly.

But, what happens when our focus is turned from what God does and speaks to us, to what we are supposed to do to be good people? Then we are left lingering in uncertainty about God attitude toward us.

Then we are never sure whether we have been good enough. Have we done enough? What if some of our dark private secrets come into light, will it destroy our goodness and salvation?

Then we don't know that God accepts us exactly as we are, for the sake of Jesus, and gladly gives us His Spirit to begin our transformation into beautiful renewed beings.

These robbers also take away our energy and time which we could spend selflessly serving our neighbors. For we can't do it, if we are not sure about God's attitude towards us. Then by all that we do, we will try to justify ourselves, proving that we are somebody, that we are good people.

But remember, forever, God is pleased with us not when we do something special in our eyes, but when we admit that He is our God, and that we are sinners. That's our reality.

When the Holy Spirit reveals it to us, when we realize that it's true, then we are ready to appreciate God purifying forgiveness, then He can graciously accept us as the loving Father, not because we deserve it, but for the sake of His Son.

Test what your shepherds are teaching you, test what I'm teaching to you. Open your Bibles, open the Book of Concord where pure explanation of the Gospel is found, and test what I'm teaching to you. You need to discern the voice of your true shepherd, of Christ. Is He today speaking to you? For only if it is so, then you will be able to follow Him into abundant life.

Jesus says: "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." He has come to call you by name, to speak to you His life giving words, to give life you and to give it abundantly. Listen carefully to His voice, don't be misled, and follow Him, to your Good Shepherd.

Amen.