

## **“Run from the robbers!” 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.”**

Do you want to have life, abundant life, life in its fullness, as rich and as satisfying and as meaningful as it could be? Not just good, but great life; if you do want it, then you need to hear what Jesus is teaching us in our Gospel reading.

We could summarize it in two parts. First, Jesus is talking about thieves and robbers who come to steal and kill and destroy. It is not hard to understand that if our well-being depends on thieves and robbers then there is a little hope for abundant life.

Second, Jesus is talking about the alternative, which is – Himself. And He says that He has come so that we may have life and have it abundantly. Today we will reflect on these two themes.

We will try to understand who are these thieves and robbers, and what exactly they are taking away from us, and this is going to be confronting. It probably will hurt. Then we will try to understand what is it that Jesus gives us.

**First, thieves and robbers.** What Jesus says is confronting. Essentially, He says that everyone else who comes to us to teach how to live, if they don't come as His faithful messengers, all are thieves and robbers.

This applies to individuals, to experts or guru or influencers as they are called today. This applies to ideologies and philosophies and religions. What Jesus says is quite radical, and it is challenging.

Let's think it through. Can it actually be true? Can we indeed call all the other voices thieves and robbers? Perhaps Jesus had in mind those really bad influences. Most of us can recognize them.

Those tempting voices that want to lead us into self-destructive habits, different addictions, hedonic lifestyle. Perhaps He meant those who encourage us to care only for ourselves, to put our interests and desires above everyone else.

Perhaps He had in mind those who live in destructive promiscuity and call others to follow their example. Maybe something else of the same sort. To that we can agree. They corrupt and impoverish our personalities and lives for they center our lives around something that is not good, that hurts and harms and destroys us and other physically, emotionally and relationally.

They hinder us from realizing our potential, and so on. It makes sense to call such voices thieves and robbers. But... Jesus can't be saying this about all the other voices. There are many various voices in every society that promote good.

Many religions are built around good principles. Many non-religious voices teach us to think positively, they teach us morals and ethics, they teach us to be kind and polite and caring and friendly and supportive and so on. There are those who even teach Christian values, whatever it means.

Jesus couldn't call all of these thieves and robbers? But He does... I told you that this is confronting. When Jesus told these figures of speech, who do you think He was speaking to? Some bad guys? Most likely Jesus was addressing Pharisees.

They were the good guys. They would make us look bad in comparison with them. They really gave their best to keep all the laws and commandments and rules. They devoted their lives to it.

They studied Scripture, they kept the Sabbath, there attended the synagogue services, they gave their offerings and all in all were excellent members of society, by far the best among others.

Thieves and robbers... So, yes, Jesus calls every other voice, – those who we may consider bad and those whom we may consider good, – He calls them all thieves and robbers, except the voice of the Good Shepherd. Yes, this is what He does.

No wonder that the most perfect, the moral elite of society hated Jesus and wanted Him dead. When you know that you are so much better, so much more morally superior than the rest of society, and you are called a thief and a robber...

If your understanding about how to live is shaped by one of these other voices, if you yourself have embraced what these voices have told you, if this critique hurts you, then you may find comfort – you are in company of many very good people.

Okay, now when we have clarified who – in Jesus' words – these thieves and robbers are, who come to steal and kill and destroy, let's clarify why Jesus calls them so. Everything begins with lies. All these voices may tell you how to live your life, teach

you vices and virtues, good or bad behaviors, but they all keep silence on where your very life comes from, on who is the Giver, the Author of your life. They are like parasites. They didn't create anything, they didn't give you your life, but now they are quick to be your shepherds.

These thieves and robbers don't know for what kind of life your God has created you either, what His design and His hopes for you are. They are blind guides, and even if they come with good intentions as the result they steal and destroy.

Jesus is not so critical and harsh just to be rude and offend someone. He says these things for He cares for every one of us. He cares for you, and wants you to have abundant life. Run from these robbers, run to Jesu!

For He has true life in Himself. Run to God the Father! For He is the very source of life. He formed you in your mother's womb. He gives you the very life-power every minute of every day. He does it. He has created us and He has redeemed us so that we may have life and have it abundantly.

Now our second topic – **how does Jesus give us life and give it abundantly?** Remember He is the Creator, and He is our Designer. He has designed us for a certain kind of life.

We won't have abundant life unless we have the life for which we are created. Every other kind of life, even if it may appear reasonably good, will be lacking the fullness and abundance that the Creator intended for you.

Which means that something will be stolen from you, something good will be destroyed and unless you listen to Jesus... these robbers will eventually lead you into eternal death. So, what does Jesus give us?

As He gives us our life, He also gives us our identity. Identity is really important. We could say that whoever or whatever gives you your core identity, your deepest and most significant identity – is your god.

You can examine yourselves. Just think about this – who are you? What is your most important identity? Sure, we all have many identities. Some are related to our relationships; some are related to what we do.

How do you think about yourself? Who are you? Is it about relationships? Husband, wife, parent? It is about what you do? Pastor, nurse, farmer, teacher, businessman, member in your congregation? Maybe it is your hobby? For you are so good...

Ask yourself which of them is the most important? Which one you can't afford to lose for otherwise your life would be destroyed, all meaning taken away, your significance shattered, your joy destroyed? Which one is it?

Many different voices teach us to focus on different identities? Live for career! Live for success! Live for romance! Live to be the best at ... something! What or who determine your most significant identity is your god.

But all the other gods will steal from you and will rob you, because unless your core identity is given by the true God, given to you by Jesus, you will lose it, sooner or later it perishes. Career, relationships, success, significance, romance... gone.

Jesus gives you identity that can never be taken away and which is the most precious, the most beautiful of all. First, Jesus gives you identity of someone who is created in God's own Image and likeness. Second, He gives you identity of God's child, His own brother or sister. What does this mean?

You see, your identity determines many things. It determines your worth, your significance, it determines the purpose and meaning of your life. And it gives you joy and satisfaction when you strive to fulfil your purpose. How does it work?

Image and likeness. It means that God the Father has personally created you as His trusted representative. He has chosen and appointed you to care for His creation. Not for entire creation, but for that place where He has put you, and for those people whom He has placed in your life. You are His trusted regent. His trusted steward.

As ambassadors receive their significance from the country they represent, so you receive your significance from God who created and placed you here. Which means – you are infinitely precious in His eyes. And nothing you do or have can add to this significance, and nothing can take it away. It comes with your identity.

But there is more. Jesus helps us to understand that this is for real, that these are not just nice sounding words. As you know He shows how significant you are to Him, but laying down His life for you. On the cross. This is how much Jesus values you. All other identities will make you to sweat and toil for them, to sacrifice for them. With Jesus it is the opposite. He toils for you. He sacrifices Himself for you.

But then, your identity also gives purpose and meaning to your live. Image and likeness. God the Father invites you to participate in His work. He invites you to help Him running this world and caring for all people around you.

When you do you work, you work together with the Creator. When you care for people in your life, you work together with God, you partake in His mission, you are on His team. Jesus, too invites you to participate in His mission.

He wants everyone to have not just life, but eternal life. He calls you and sends you as His messengers. He entrusts you His life-giving and life-changing Gospel, He places His words in your heart and on your lips and when you invite other into the fellowship with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit knocks at their hearts.

You see, it is a miraculous adventure, you are involved in. You are carriers of eternal life, by your speaking someone may be brought in God's eternal Kingdom. May it happen! So, what about that for a purpose and meaning for our lives – to be God's coworkers and to be Jesus' messengers inviting others into fellowship with God.

And, of course, as you live out these your identities as God's most precious creature and His child, the joy and meaning and satisfaction abound. Sure, there are challenges for we still live in a sinful world, and we even have God's promise that we will be hated for Jesus' name's sake, but it is totally worth it.

For this life is only the beginning. The identity that Jesus gives you, the life that He gives you begins here, but it will last forever. You are eternal creatures. And what is to come can't yet be put in words, for it surpasses anything we can dream about.

Just one last thing. Your name. Our name is one of the most beautiful sounds we hear in this world. Not nicknames, not diminutives. Our names. It is so nice to hear someone addressing us by name.

Especially, if this someone is someone important. And they know your name... they know you. They speak to you. Jesus knows your name. And He calls you by your name. Yes, all authority in heaven and on earth is given to Him.

He is the One whose glory fills the heavens and the earth, He is the One to whom seraphim sing "Holy, holy, holy!" And He calls you by name. "Follow me!" He goes first. He has gone through the gates of death and has come out on the other side.

Glorious, beautiful, majestic. Your Shepherd. He is committed to you. For you are created in His Image, and if you respond to His invitation, He calls you brothers and sisters. And He will lead you to be where He is.

So, it doesn't matter what voices you have followed so far. If you were tricked by thieves and robbers, if they had stolen and robbed you of your beautiful God-given identity and significance and meaning and joy...

Then hear the voice of Jesus calling you, He will return to you what was stolen, He will heal you and He will bless you. Run from the thieves and robbers, run to Jesus so that you may have life and have it abundantly.

Amen.