

April 26, 2026

John 10:1-10

“The Voice You Know and the Door You Pass
Through!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ and my dear Confirmation class,

In the ancient Near East, shepherds did not guide their sheep with fences, dogs, or force. They led them by their voice. In village life, it was common for several shepherds to bring their flocks together into a shared stone sheepfold overnight for protection. Nineteenth century travelers to Palestine, such as William M. Thomson in *The Land and the Book*, describe seeing this with their own eyes. Different flocks mixed together in one enclosure during the night.

Then, in the morning, something striking happened. Each shepherd would come to the opening of the fold and call out - not loudly, not violently, but with a distinct and familiar voice. There was no sorting, no confusion, no force. The sheep lifted their heads, listened carefully, and then began to separate themselves. Each one followed the voice it knew. When a stranger tried to imitate the call, the sheep would hesitate and then pull back. They would not follow a voice they did not recognize.

That everyday, observable reality stands directly behind the words of Jesus in John chapter 10. He is not telling a sentimental story about animals. He is explaining how faith works, how his people are gathered, how they are led, and how they come to life. It says in John 10:3, “The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”

One of the lessons that we learn from this is the following: voices matter. And the question that Jesus puts before us today is simple and searching. Whose voice will you trust and follow? That matters deeply on a day like today. Confirmation is a joyful and holy day, but it is not a graduation from struggle and trouble. It is not immunity from doubt or temptation. In many ways, it is standing at the edge of a much louder unbelieving world. Jesus does not pretend otherwise. He tells the truth. There are many voices calling for your trust that you may follow them.

Some voices promise happiness through success and achievement. Some promise freedom through defining yourself rather than your Baptism. Some promise belonging through approval of others. And some even sound religious. They talk about God, or goodness, or spirituality. But slowly - sometimes almost imperceptibly - they move your trust away from Jesus - his gospel and sacraments - and back onto yourself and lies. Luther warned that some of the most dangerous thieves are not always the obvious enemies of the church, but false pastors who keep religious language while redirecting faith away from Jesus by twisting the Bible and emptying the Sacraments of the forgiveness of sins. Jesus uses strong language for those voices: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.” That is not exaggeration. It is honesty.

Any voice that tells you your worth depends on your performance, and that God loves you only if you improve enough, that your value comes from your achievements, or that your sins define you more than God’s mercy is a voice that is not giving life. It is stealing it. Left to ourselves, we are easily led. We are drawn to voices that flatter our pride or quiet our guilt without actually forgiving it. We often like shepherds who affirm us rather than rescue us. And the result is real. Anxiety grows. Shame lingers. Fear settles in. Life becomes exhausting and a constant effort to deserve what can only be given at the cross of Jesus and his resurrection.

Into that noise, Jesus does not shout. He speaks. “He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” This is where Luther tells us to spend our quality time. Christianity is not about general truths floating in the air. It is about a particular voice speaking to particular sinners. Christ does not simply say, “Sheep, follow me.” He says, “You.” He knows your name. He knows your life. He knows your sins, your fears, your future. And knowing all of it, he still calls you his own.

That is the Gospel. You did not find the Shepherd. The Shepherd found you. Jesus says: “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” That abundance is not a guarantee of easy circumstances or constant happiness. Luther describes it as a conscience made at peace by forgiveness, and a life freed from trying to justify itself before God or trying to live a life like this unbelieving world. He is right. There is nothing more valuable than a conscience at peace with God and ready to be with him in heaven forever.

Jesus speaks not only about a shepherd, but also about a door. And he is clear. He says it plainly: “I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved.” That one sentence overturns every religious system that tries to add conditions or alternate paths to salvation. No one climbs over the wall into God’s favor. No one sneaks in through good intentions. No one earns access by being spiritual enough. There is one door. And that door is a person who speaks and saves.

Because Christ is the door, you are no longer locked outside wondering if you have done enough. Because Christ is the shepherd, you are not abandoned to guess your way through life. Because he lays down his life for the sheep, your sins are not waiting to be punished. They have already been carried to the cross. Follow his voice. Hear it clearly this day. Your faith is not strong because you are strong. Your faith is strong because Christ is faithful. You are not held by your grip on him, but by his grip on you. That is why your faith can endure weakness, doubt, and struggle. The Shepherd does not stop calling.

He continuously calls in the Bible. There is his voice speaking to you. And his voice never stops speaking to you in the waters of Baptism where you have been given your identity for the rest of your life. Your name is cleansed by the holy name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You are his children who have the inheritance of eternal life. And that voice comes in the Lord’s Supper, where the Good Shepherd does not only call his sheep by name but feeds them with his very own body and blood so that you may be certain that he loves you and good things are yours, even in those moments when you look around and there doesn’t seem to be anything good at all.

Jesus is always there in his gospel and sacraments. In this way the Shepherd keeps you as his own. As you can see, this matters beyond today. It matters on ordinary mornings and difficult nights. It matters in temptation and in sorrow. When you feel like a failure, the Shepherd says, “I have died for you.” When you are afraid of the future, he says, “I lead. You follow.” When you think that your sins are too big, he says, “I am the door.” And when other voices grow loud - and they will - Jesus makes this promise (v 28), “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

In the countryside of Judea, away from towns and villages, shepherds often used temporary sheep folds. They were simple enclosures of stone, brush, or thorns, with one narrow opening and no wooden

gate. There was nothing to latch or lock once the sheep were inside. So when evening came and darkness fell, the shepherd did something that seems almost unimaginable to us. He did not walk away. He did not set traps. He did not post guards. He laid his own body across the opening.

Yes. The shepherd became the door. If a predator tried to enter, it had to go through him first. If a thief came under cover of darkness, he could not enter unnoticed. And if a sheep tried to wander, it could not leave without encountering the shepherd. The sheep slept - not because the world was suddenly safe, but because the shepherd was there. That captures the words of Jesus when he says "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved." Jesus is not saying he merely points the way to safety. He is saying that he is your safety.

At the cross, he laid down in death to save you from death. He laid down to block this unbelieving world. He laid down and became sin to save you from Satan and hell itself. And he laid himself down to die that he might keep you from wandering away only to be lost. Indeed. Christ placed himself between you and sin, judgment, and death, so that you might be his forgiven sheep, counted as righteous, and welcomed into heaven. You are safe because Jesus has laid himself down as your door.

There may be moments when you want to wander - I pray you never do - there may be moments when you are plagued doubt - I pray they will always be resolved - and there may even be moments when you lose your way. In all moments may you always be brought back to **The Voice You Know and to The Door You Pass Through!**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott