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4th Sunday of Easter
11 May 2014
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
John 10:1-10

Christ is Risen! (*He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!*)

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

A sheepfold is a small plot of land, surrounded typically by stone walls,
intended as a sort of night-time fortress for the sheep.

It was never quite as big as the sheep would like,
and the walls were rugged and cold.
But they did their job: the sheep stayed in and the wolves stayed out.

The door to the sheepfold was guarded by the gatekeeper.
It wasn't just wolves that hunted the sheep,
it was also thieves, trying to make a buck;
and drunk college kids, thinking it'd be fun torture the poor sheep.
As you well know, there's a lot in this world gone wrong.
So the sheepfold was walled in and guarded—
a refuge and fortress for the sheep.

That's how it is at night, after a long day.
But when morning comes, the sheep want nothing more than to run in the fields.
So when they wake up they run to the door and wait.
Sometimes patiently, other times they bleat and cry and wonder when the Shepherd will come.
But their eyes are fixed on the door and their ears perk up when they hear his voice.

Sheep know the voice of their shepherd.
And that voice is pure joy!
That voice means it's time to play—
time to run and smell the flowers
and drink from the brook
and go on adventures.

Sure, the voice speaks kindly to the sheep—but not always.
Sometimes that voice needs to call the sheep back from wandering.
Sometimes that voice scolds the sheep for fighting, or getting into something it shouldn't.
But all in all, that voice is the voice of joy.
And even the harsh reprimands are for the sake of the sheep's wellness.

That's the rhythm of the sheep: safety by night in the sheepfold, joy by day in the pastures.
And all is well.

Well, not quite.
There are also other voices.
Occasionally, in the sheepfold a strange voice is heard.

This frightens the sheep, as it should.
 A foreign voice shouldn't be here.
 He didn't come in the gate, he doesn't have authority, something's not right!
 This other voice creates fear, for he is a thief and only comes to steal, kill, and destroy.
 He doesn't enter through the door; he *can't* enter through the door—
 he wouldn't be allowed in.
 So he sneaks in another way.
 He is a wolf in sheep's clothing.
 He hides and forces himself on those least expecting.

Between the thieves and the wolves, the sheep long all the more for the voice of their shepherd.
 For his voice brings the certainty of salvation.

That's our parable—a figure of speech Jesus used to teach us who He is and who we are *in Him*.

We are the sheep.
 He is the gate.
 The Church is the sheepfold.
 The walls are the Law.
 The pasture is the Gospel.
 The shepherd (at least in this first part of the story) is the pastor—who comes with the authority
 of the gatekeeper.
 The voice of the Shepherd is God's own Word.
 And the wolves and the thieves are Satan and his messengers from hell.
 All those that have come apart from Christ are false prophets, deceivers, destroyers.
 And any life apart from that of sheepfold to pasture is no life at all—
 but in fact a road into the wolf's mouth of death.

It's fairly straight forward, but it's amazing how often we try to have life a different way.
 We all know the thrill of trying to sneak out of the sheepfold.
 We know the enticement of the thieves.
 We know the lust for excitement, the thrill of adventure—even sinful adventure.
 We say to ourselves: I'll come back—just a night out under the moon.
 We convince ourselves that the wolves aren't as deadly as we've been told.
 In fact, we imagine a good wolf,
 one that offers the risk and thrill, without the deadly consequences.

We also know what it's like to run off and not return to the sheepfold.
 We get in our habits, our other rhythms, our independence—and that makes it all the harder to
 stick to the sheepfold.

And after a while, we no longer recognize the shepherd's voice.
 All the voices start sounding alike.
 And then we say, "that's a good thing!"

Still there are other sheep among us who really don't like the rigid walls.

We'd prefer softer edges, that way when we lean up against the wall it's not so painful.
Perhaps thinner walls, or movable walls, or perhaps just a bunch of doors is what we need.

There are many ways in which the sheep's life isn't so peaceful, so easy.
And so it is for you.

Our sinful passions and desires don't want to be restrained by the walls.
It's constant and faithful hearing that teaches us to recognize the shepherd's voice.
We're so self-focused we think we know what's best for us;
when all the while the Shepherd only desires that we *have life and have it abundantly*.

Repent.
Join the flock in the sheepfold.
Wait with longing eyes for the return of your Good Shepherd.
Listen to His voice and rejoice at His coming.
Feed on the pastures He lays before you, and drink from the brook that flows from His side.

For Christ is the Door and Christ is the Shepherd;
Christ is the Sheepfold and Christ is the Pasture.

He is the life that you are now called to participate in.
He is the joy and the excitement, the refuge and the fortress.
You are His sheep.
You are called by His name.
And when that's the case, all the thieves and wolves and fences and fears go away.

For God has wakened from death the Shepherd of His sheep!
He lives and you live in Him.
And so it will be forever.

Christ is risen! (*He's risen indeed, alleluia!*)

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit