

NORTH MAIN SERMON APRIL 26, 2026

Ezekiel 34: 7-15

“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ⁸ As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, ⁹ therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁰ This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.

¹¹ “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴ I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

JOHN 10:1-10 The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

10 “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the

sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.^[a] They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

THE WORD OF GOD...

Our first reading today from Ezekiel, is a divine judgment against the selfish "shepherds" (leaders) of Israel who neglected the people, resulting in their scattering. God vows to hold these leaders accountable, rescue His flock from them, and personally intervene to seek, gather, and tenderly care for His sheep, bringing them back to their own land to feed in rich, secure pasture "*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*" Great verse, but what does it mean? Or in this case, how do we get it? What do we need to do to experience this abundant life? We need to learn to listen. Okay, it is never as simple as that. That is only a part of our task. We need to not only listen but to follow. We need to not only listen but to trust. We need to not only listen but to hope. We need to not only listen ...WE ALL GET THIS .. BUT DO WE LISTEN.

This week, we need to focus on our need to listen. Following, says Jesus in this passage, is a product of listening. He will lead, he tells us in verse four, but only after we've come out at the sound of his voice. He will lead, he tells us, if we choose to follow. And the only way we can follow is if we know that voice, if we can recognize the sound of it.

So, how do we know? How do we figure out which voice is his? **John 10 opens with the image of a shepherd with sheep. And the first five**

verses are all about the shepherd and how his voice is the familiar and trusted voice for his own sheep. Unfortunately, John doesn't help us out a whole lot in these verses. There is more involved than we can pull out of John, chapter ten. There is just possibly a bit more Eastertide in John 10 than first meets the eye! In John 10:6, right after Jesus says all this about the shepherd and the sheep, we are told that the disciples and others listening to Jesus that day "did not understand what he was telling them." Apparently even when we recognize the Good Shepherd's voice, we don't necessarily always understand what he is saying to us! But there are a couple of hints in these verses. First, the Shepherd knows our name. The call that comes from Christ matches us in the deepest essence of our being. He calls us to be who we are, not who we might think we want to be, or who the world tells us we need to be. We don't like being compared to sheep, which is quite unfortunate, because the Bible compares us to sheep all the time. Sheep are dirty and smelly, and they aren't that smart. But if sheep aren't very smart, how do they know their shepherd's voice? Like it or not, we're sheep (according to this week's scripture) so we need to be like the sheep and ask ourselves.. How do we, like sheep, know our Shepherd's voice?

Today we are continuing the sensory journey of seeing, touching, feeling and we now go to hearing. In Jesus' parable of the good shepherd, he says that the sheep listen to his voice. Now, what is interesting is that he is speaking of the sheep of other folds, not the ones in front of him. It is in the first part of the chapter where he talks about us hearing and knowing and following his voice. **Let's start with silence.** How do we give space for those who have come to worship to spend time in contemplation and silence? We sometimes think that we have to fill the hour of worship with sound or with action or movement. But sometimes just sitting still is the most prayerful time we can spend. That is when we can listen for God's voice.

We just celebrated on Wednesday, April 22, Earth Day, and this is the Sunday designated for the observance of that event. We are called to partner with God in the stewardship of all creation. Too often, we see our worship space as the be all and end all of our responsibilities when we seek to encounter God. But we can hear the voice of God through the

natural world. If we are to take seriously hearing God through the world around us, then we have to take seriously the care of the Earth. The invitation is to listen, to carefully listen. But not only listen, we expect to hear. Jesus doesn't say, "Listen and maybe I'll have something to say." He says, "Listen to my voice." "I am speaking" is the implied message, so pay attention. Pay attention to all that God has given us.

It's unlikely that many young people, if taking a personality inventory, would choose "shepherd" as a career path. In fact, it's unlikely most of us have even seen a shepherd, except perhaps in a picture or on television. It's not a common profession in our culture, but in Jesus' day the work of the shepherd was well known.

Jesus often compared spiritual principles to things found in the everyday life of his contemporaries. In this teaching, Jesus uses the imagery of a shepherd to help us better understand how he relates to his followers. The first image is that of a shepherd going and coming through a door to the sheepfold. The second is that of sheep coming and going through that door.

I. The Good Shepherd Cares for Us

Jesus' words remind us of a low stone fence surrounding a Palestinian home. The shepherd shelters his sheep in the fold near the house at night. Thieves and robbers will climb over the wall, causing the sheep to bleat and scurry about. The shepherd knows that entry by the door of the fold is calming to the sheep. The sheep recognize their shepherd and respond with relief. Sheep run to safety until they recognize someone familiar. The good shepherd is deliberate, careful, cautious, caring. Those who sneak over walls really don't care about the sheep. We have a shepherd who cares about us. In the sight of Jesus Christ, we are more than just a number. We are more than a picture on a driver's license. We are known by God and cared for by our Lord. We are the sheep he tends.

II. The Good Shepherd Protects Us

The second image of this text is the door as exit and entry for the sheep. We imagine sheep safe in the fold during the night when harm might come to them. I often hear people say that they can be religious without the church. I don't know how you feel but I consider the church is a

sheepfold into which we enter and from which we exit. It is a place of security, a place of safety, a place of promise. Life is not easy and here we can find support.

In verse nine, we are told that Christ is the way: “Whoever enters by me will be saved.” But then the text says we will come in and go out and find pasture. Come in and go out. There is a lot of movement in the Christian life. We don’t just sit; we don’t just find a safe corner and remain there. We don’t lounge in place waiting to be fed. We find our sustenance in coming and going, in study and service, in spending time with the word and going out to share it. We are called to be coming and going throughout our lives.

If we feel as though we are pulled in too many directions, then we need to come back. Worship with the community of faith, study together the Word. On the other hand, if we feel as though our faith isn’t doing much, then we need to go—go and serve, go and help, volunteer in the community, do something with our hands, teach or share, help or heal. There are lots of opportunities for us to be going out in service to the world.

The odd thing is that it is both in the coming and in the going we learn to listen. We listen through the study and contemplation of the Word. But we also listen through the voices of need and hope in the people around us. And the more we listen, the more we come to recognize the voice of the Shepherd. A life of no regrets is a life lived in hearing distance of Jesus Christ.

We have a shepherd who cares about us. In the sight of Jesus Christ, we are more than we are known by God and cared for by our Lord. We are the sheep he tends.

We have been refreshed and restored. We have been called and guided. Let us go forth knowing who our true shepherd is, following his path, secure in the knowledge that goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life. Amen.