



May 3, 2020 • The 4th Sunday of Easter
Good Shepherd Sunday
John 10: 1-10
The Rev. Anthony Estes

"That's a good breeze, Phyllis!"

Phyllis is my grandmother. And my grandfather would yell that out to my grandmother on a hot summer day at their home in northwest Detroit.

You see that home did not have any central air. There was an air conditioner — one window unit in the dining room — where my grandfather's recliner was, and he would watch television.

The only way that any cooler air could circulate through the house was for the front door to be open...and the screen door would allow air to blow through. Except that the air in the house wasn't really moving. And so, the only consolation was this breeze that would come through there every now and then. And my grandfather would yell: *"That's a nice breeze there, Phyllis!"*

Doors...doors are these places of access to our homes. They are security features. They let air in if they have some of those mesh screens in them. And...they keep other elements out...such as rain, and even people...people who do not belong.

In this passage of John, which was our gospel reading for the day, Jesus tells this parable shortly after he has healed a man who was born blind.

And Jesus is explaining to all those who would hear him, including some Pharisees, that there is *more* to being blind than just physical sight. Perhaps he is trying to give them a lesson about who He truly is if they would have the ears to hear and the eye to see.

He begins to tell this parable of sheep that are in a pen. A thief and a robber try to enter that sheepfold. They try to take the sheep, but the sheep will not listen to them, will not respond to their calls, because the sheep are attuned, they are accustomed, to the voice of the shepherd, the shepherd whom they *will* follow.

And Jesus says He is the shepherd, the shepherd who shows up at the door and is granted access. And He calls his sheep by name and leads them out.

And then later He says that He is the door, the very access point, who allows the sheep to go back and forth, vacillating between safety and sustenance on the pasture.

What are we to make of this parable in these days?

I think that one thing that we must always remember is that the life that is afforded to those who believe in Jesus Christ is a life of resurrection joy...is a life of the future that has broken into the present.

It is a life that is made possible because of the finished work of Christ on Calvary. He inaugurated it with the resurrection from the dead. God, the Father, was not content to let him stay dead but raised him on the third day.

And because we believe in His name, that resurrection life is afforded to us.

In the parable, Jesus describes this sheep pen that it is relatively safe. There is someone watching the door perhaps overnight while the shepherd is away, resting.

Even with that protector, the pen is still somewhat vulnerable in this parable. The thief and the bandit are able to come — unbeknownst to the sheep, unbeknownst to the watcher — to harass and attack the sheep.

But what are we to make of that? I think that, try as we might, we must always understand that there are things in this life that come to threaten our peace...that come to threaten our sense of safety.

And at least as far as John's Gospel is concerned...the remedy, the hero, the savior that protects us from those outside forces...is Jesus.

In John's Gospel, Jesus will say that He is the way and the truth and the life.

Our enemies — sin and death — Jesus dealt a decisive and overcoming blow to them at His death and resurrection. It is the mystery, it is the victory that we celebrate every time we come together around His word and sacraments...and, in this season, The Word of God, Christ being present among us.

Will you see Him in The Word?

Will you see Him as the shepherd leading you to sustenance and safety?

Will you see Him as the one who makes sure that you have a good life? (Not because of the clothes you wear, or the place you live, or the car you drive or the job you have.)

Know that, in the midst of chaos and turmoil and sickness and disease and death, *inside* you have a peace and a joy that the world cannot give...that surpasses all knowledge and understanding.

Can you allow yourself to see that in you right now is a resurrection life?

Can you allow yourself to see that Christ is risen because Christ is risen in you?...in this community of faith...in this congregation that I am glad to be a part of?

Can you see yourself sharing this message with others...those who are looking for proof of a risen Lord, those who are looking for a Messiah, those who are looking for salvation?

Can you let your life be the witness that the best thing you could ever do is be a sheep of God, walking through the door that is Jesus?

That door at my grandparents' house...yes...it would let that good breeze in. And in the summer, you could hear the slam of it being opened and closed as me and my sisters and other grandchildren came in...and out. That house was a place of gathering, a place of festivity, a place of laughter.

What we *have* in Jesus Christ is a community. We gather around The Word and in The Word and we find peace and joy in it...and in one another.

This is what it means to be Easter people with Easter faith.
This is what it means to have Christ as the Good Shepherd.

It means that the only thing *you* have to worry about...is being sheep. You don't have to worry about who is at the door.

All you have to do is be a sheep...be a lamb frolicking and flourishing under the watchful eye of our Shepherd.

Amen!