**Rightly Called to Be a Shepherd**

Based on [John 10:1-10](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn10.1-10)

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In the gospel lesson, Jesus makes a comparison between a shepherd taking care of sheep, and Jesus himself taking care of his church through pastors. The word pastor is the Latin word for shepherd, and Jesus teaches three things about pastors. First that pastors are rightly called to serve the church in the stead and by the command of Jesus Christ. Second, that pastors teach the church according to sound doctrine of Jesus Christ. Third that pastors direct the church to abundant life through Jesus Christ.

First that pastors are rightly called to serve the church in the stead and by the command of Jesus Christ. Jesus says, “**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 are Jesus’ own people, believers. The sheepfold is where believers gather. There is a door into the sheepfold that the shepherd enters by to gain access to the sheep.

Just as you enter your own house lawfully in broad daylight through the door, so too lawful shepherds enter the sheepfold through the door. The only reason someone would not enter through the door, but sneak in through the window is to rob the place, to have access to things that do not belong to him.

Article 14 of the Augsburg Confession, the first Confession of the Lutheran church says, “**Our churches teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered Call.**” A rightly ordered call is a public and open acknowledgment by the church that this particular man is called by God to be a pastor, and undershepherd of Christ’s sheep. Any many who would presume to shepherd Christ’s sheep, to publically preach or administer Holy Communion without the Christ having called him, is a thief and a robber. Because he doesn’t have a right tend the sheep.

Someone might say, “I have faith in Jesus Christ, and he has called me to share my faith and proclaim the gospel to all people. Pastors are not the only ones who are called to speak God’s word to people.” This is true, that all people are called in their baptism to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. **But not all are called to publically teach in the church. On the street corner, in your house, having coffee with your friends and neighbors you can and should speak God’s word**. But in the sheepfold, the place where Jesus’ sheep gather, the sheep are not all shepherds. Rather there is a shepherd that is recognized by them, who comes in through the door in plain sight because he is lawfully called and recognized to be the shepherd Jesus has sent them.

An illustration, a husband is called to love all women, indeed all people, even his enemies Jesus says. But he is called to be the husband of one woman, his wife, whom he is to love as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. It is quite common today for a man to say, “Yes I live with this woman, we have children together and I love her. We don’t need to get married for me to love her and treat her right.” **To that man I would say, if you love this woman and do intend to love her for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health; and if you presume to live with her and have intimate relations with her and raise children with her, why don’t you enter into that relationship by the door?** Why don’t you get married, so that everyone can publically recognize that you are her rightful husband? Instead you sneak into the relationship like a thief, taking all the goods without taking the vow of God-given responsibility towards her? Such a man is a thief and a robber. If he truly loved her, he would marry her, commit himself openly before God and witnesses. Only a thief and a robber would take a woman to be his helper, companion, and mother of his children without making her his lawfully wedded wife.

So too, only one who has openly taken pastoral vows can be said to have entered through the door to lawfully shepherd the God’s sheep in and out of the fold. To him, Jesus says, the flock rightfully belongs and to him the gatekeeper opens. To such a rightly-called pastor, the Holy Spirit entrusts God’s people. Paul says to the rightly called pastors in Ephesus in Acts chapter 20:28, “**Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which *the Holy Spirit* has made you bishops, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.**” A pastor who enters through the door has been given authority by the gatekeeper, Holy Spirit himself, to tend the sheep and care for the flock.

And scripture is clear that this authority carries a greater responsibility, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account” (Hebrews 13:17). “**Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness**” (James 3:1). Woe to the playboy who woos away women without openly taking vows of accountability. Woe to the false shepherd who would presume to tend Christ’s sheep without a rightly ordered call.

Second, that pastors teach the church according to sound doctrine of Jesus Christ. Jesus continues, “**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**.” Jesus is speaking in metaphor here. Of course none of us knows literally what Jesus’ voice sounds like, was he a tenor or bass or anything like that. But voice here is used to represent teaching. Just as sheep really do recognize and take comfort in the familiar voice of their known shepherd, so too Jesus’ sheep recognize and take comfort in the familiar teaching of his word, and different and strange teaching will cause them to flee and scatter which is exactly what has happened today with the thousands of heterodox church bodies.

Paul continues his exhortation to the Pastors in Ephesus, “**I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified**” (Acts 20:29-32).

This is exactly the situation the Christian sheepfold finds itself in today. Literally thousands of Christian denominations exist, and this is not because doctrine divides**. Christ is not divided, his word and teaching is one. Doctrine doesn’t divide the sheep, false doctrine does.** And this happens when false shepherds, wolves in sheeps clothing come into the sheepfold and begin teaching new and strange things. Some can even be pastors who are rightly called and recognized to be pastors, but they use their office to stir up dissentions by quibbling over doctrines of men.

The most obvious example of this today is in those who promote “Church vision.” If a church has its own vision, a mission statement and purpose that is truly *its own*, then it is heterodox and not from Christ. **And yet you have pastors, some self-proclaimed leaders of churches, others who are rightly called and ordained within church bodies, who present themselves as “vision-casting leaders”, who either forge their own church, or else infiltrate faithful churches to fashion them after their own image.** And those who infiltrate faithful churches to give them a new vision and purpose, they are the worst. They are the wolves. They do not speak with the voice of Christ, and so the faithful scatter, leave while the unfaithful remain and become new disciples of this new Christ with his new vision.

Scripture says, “**If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain**” (1 Tim. 6:5).

There is only one vision of the sheepfold because there is only one good shepherd, Jesus Christ and he is not divided. **When a rightly called pastor teaches according to the sound words of Christ, he speaks with the voice of Christ, the voice that gathers the sheep who listen to it, the voice that gives comfort and assurance**; the voice that the sheep obey willingly because it is not a strangers voice, it is the voice of their Good Shepherd.

Third that pastors direct the church to abundant life through Jesus Christ. Jesus says, “**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**.” The shepherd enters the sheepfold to gather the sheep, he leads them out of the sheepfold to find pasture for them and he enters and leaves through the door.

This makes it clear that when Jesus says, “I am the door” he is not simply speaking about being the door to heaven. This is certainly true, as Jesus says elsewhere, “**I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the father except through me**”, this is not what he means here. Strange indeed it would be if Jesus were the door by which we enter and leave heaven and find pasture. He means that the pastor enters the sheepfold through him and he leads them out of the sheepfold through him as well. And he leads them out to find pasture.

The sheepfold is the congregation of saint, believers everywhere who gather together to hear God’s word and receive his gifts. **The pastor enters the congregation of saints through the door, through Jesus himself, who calls and ordains pastors by the Holy Spirit, and gives them his voice by entrusting them with his teaching.**  But believers don’t just congregate every Sunday and that’s it. The pastor also leads them out of the congregation and back into the world through the door, through Christ, to go out into the world and find pasture, fruitful labour and life in service to God and neighbor in daily life.

This is the abundant life that Christ has prepared for his people on earth until he comes again. His people congregate into the sheepfold, shepherded there by a called pastor who enters through the door. There he publically teaches them so that they hear His voice. Finally he dismisses them with a blessing through the very same door to go out into the world living lives abundant with the Holy Spirit.