

Pentecost Tuesday;

JOHN 10:1-11

Contents: Three classes of preachers.

JOHN 10:1-10

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

1. This Gospel lesson presents to us in a picture and parable that which is elsewhere taught concerning Christ's kingdom and the office of preaching in the Church. The same topic, is continued in the Gospel of the good shepherd immediately following our text. Both portions distinguish the different kinds of teaching that claim to point to heaven; and from these words we may correctly judge which are the true teachings of the Holy Spirit. There are three distinct kinds of teaching here considered. Only one of them can save the soul. The first is the teaching of those whom Christ calls thieves and murderers; the second, that of the porter of the sheepfold; the third, that of the true shepherd, to whom the porter opens and whom he permits to enter. John says that the disciples did not rightly understand this parable until Christ explained that he himself, and he alone, was the door of the sheepfold and that he was likewise the shepherd. We, too, would not understand it if he had not shown us the interpretation.

I. THE FIRST CLASS OF PREACHERS – THIEVES AND MURDERERS

2. It is a fact that these three classes are always found in the Christian Church. Herein is danger, and the need that the people be warned to be on their guard and to protect themselves

well against teachers who spread heresy and destruction, and whose only object, wherever they appear among the sheep, is to steal from them the true pasture of pure doctrine and God's Word, and to destroy their souls also. Therefore the apostles diligently warned the Christians against such teachers. Paul, in Acts 20:29-30, prophesies to them saying: "I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock," etc.

3. Such are they who would lord it over souls with doctrines formulated or invented by their own wisdom, or who, with good intent, would dictate to them about what they should do if they would be saved. As, for example, did the Pharisees and scribes among the Jews; they thought themselves saved by their own human doctrines and writings and the worship of good works. And they in the papacy expect to be saved by that utter filth – their own false and self-chosen works, worship and monkery; not to mention their public idolatry and shameful lying nonsense – praying to deceased saints, their indulgences, purgatory and the like. They indeed do not wish to be regarded as thieves and murderers; they would be respected in the world as worthy, invaluable, and safe teachers and preachers. But when they are made manifest by the Word of Christ, it is discovered that they awfully mislead and ruin the souls who follow them.

4. They are called thieves because they come stealthily sneaking, and with smooth speech, as Paul says in Romans 16:18; and they come also with imposing airs, and in true sheep's clothing, especially advertising their faithfulness and their love of souls. But these are the very marks by which, as Christ teaches, they are to be known; they do not enter by the door, but climb up some other way, or, as Christ himself explains, they come before him and without him, not pointing and directing to him as the only Shepherd and Savior.

5. For the words "came before me" do not refer to those who preached before Christ; nor only to those who undertake to preach without a call and secretly sneak into the fold, who are certainly no better than thieves and murderers. But the words refer in general to all those – yea to them who have a true call and are regularly installed in office – who do not begin with and adhere to the doctrine of faith in Christ as the chief article of Christianity, but mislead the people, directing to their own holiness and their own worship, which ignores faith in Christ. If it were not for this error, such teachers would never harm with their doctrine; for all doctrines concerning works would be harmless if they did not teach faith and trust in works as being sufficient to merit the forgiveness of sins. But in no case is to be tolerated the teaching that we are to place in them our confidence and faith, for it should be centered alone in Christ; nor that we esteem them to be a special service to God when they are without the Word of God.

6. We could also without wrong keep all the commandments of the pope and of his councils if they be not in opposition to God's Word – when they refer only to outward order and the observance of certain times – the use of certain clothing, meats, and the like; as in other things a person may follow custom. Yes, such outward and immaterial things were without harm if they did not claim that they are necessary to salvation or serve to promote it. Just so the greater part of their priestcraft and monkery is mere unprofitable, useless jugglery and simply child's play, appropriate to a Shrove-Tuesday carnival performance or to a puppet show. But that they should command man to do such works at the peril of being lost, and say, He who

fails to do them shall fall under the wrath and displeasure of God Almighty and of all the saints, and be condemned to hell – that is the wolf-like and murderous voice of the true Antichrist in Christendom.

7. Now, these destructive thieves and murderers are the great multitude; they are always in the majority in the world. And they cannot be different since they are out of Christ. The world desires such wolf preaching, and is not worthy of anything better since it will not hear nor respect Christ. Hence it is that there are so few true Christians and faithful preachers, always outnumbered by the members of the false church. Teachers and pupils mislead one another; as Moses says, the drunkards draw the thirsty after them and lead them to ruin. Deuteronomy 29:19. But Christ on the other hand comforts the true Church with his counsel to his dear sheep to guard against the false teachers and not to listen to, nor follow, them; as he says later, in plainer words: “My sheep hear my voice, but they hear not the voice of strangers.”

8. True, the sheep may at first and for a time be deceived by the false appearance and actions of thieves and robbers. Such has been the case hitherto under the papacy when all the pulpits and churches were filled with the false and only a few sheep heard the voice of Christ, the true shepherd; as Christ declared in Matthew 24:24, saying, that they would lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Yet, at last he shall help them to hear the voice of the true shepherd and follow him. And many such have been snatched out of the errors of papacy even on their death-beds, and have laid hold of Christ and died in him.

9. Now, these are the first class of cursed teachers and preachers who directly oppose Christ and only mislead and ruin souls. These he sharply distinguishes from himself, and passes judgment, teaching that we are not to hear them at all nor tolerate them, and that they who, themselves out of Christ, point the people elsewhere, are only thieves and murderers.

II. THE SECOND CLASS OF PREACHERS – PORTERS OF THE FOLD

10. There are other preachers, who advocate God’s law and commandments, not devised of themselves, but taken from the Scriptures. Such were the teachers or scribes among the Jews, so far as they adhered to Moses and the Scriptures; of whom Christ says: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe.” Matthew 23:3.

11. These teachings in themselves do not oppose Christ, but they who make use of them to teach the people to trust in themselves and in salvation through the works of the Law, are thieves and murderers like the others; for they also hinder and restrain the sheep from coming to Christ.

12. But if these preachers are to rightly serve, faithfully and helpfully, they must not themselves climb into the sheepfold like the others, nor attempt to be shepherds; they must be simply porters and servants of the true shepherd, Christ, keeping the sheep in shelter and safety and not allowing strangers to break in upon them, and preparing for and giving place to the shepherd, who himself leads them out to pasture and in. Further, their office is appointed

not to feed themselves, but to open to the shepherd; then the sheep hear the shepherd himself and are fed by him.

13. Such among the Jewish people were Moses and the prophets, likewise John the Baptist; and such are all who still preach the Law for repentance, to point the people to Christ, who shall save them from sin and death. So, then, such exercise both offices of the porter. They restrain strangers who come as shepherds to draw the sheep after them, taking care that the sheep be not misled by the delusion of a false confidence in their works, but learn to know their sins and danger and be ready to heed their shepherd. Paul speaks of the office of the Law, in Galatians 3:23-24, mentioning how it was given that we might be kept in ward under it, and shut up unto the future faith in Christ. “So,” he says, “the Law is become our tutor to bring us unto Christ, that we might be just(fied by faith.” Where the Law is so taught that man, threatened by the wrath and punishment of God, is outwardly held under good discipline, and restrained from presumption and carelessness, and is inwardly urged by fear and terror to feel his helplessness and misery and to recognize his own inability – where the Law is so taught, the fold is rightly closed and guarded, and the sheep cannot run away into error and thus become a prey to wolves.

14. But this preaching and office of the porter is not enough for the sheep. For if they should remain thus shut up, they would suffer and die from hunger. Therefore another duty of the porter is to open the door to the true shepherd, who himself comes and feeds the sheep. It is all for his sake – the preaching and teaching in the Church; otherwise one would not dare be a doorkeeper or preacher.

15. It is, however, opening the door to Christ when we thus teach the Law, as we said. God requires us to keep these commandments at the peril of our eternal condemnation. And though you have kept them as perfectly as you can, you must know that you will neither be justified nor saved thereby before God; for you can never fulfill them, as you are indebted to do. And if you were to fulfill them, still you would not thereby merit that God should give you mote than he has already given you, for which you are in duty bound to obey him; as Christ says: “Even so ye also, when ye shall have done the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do.” Luke 17:10. Therefore you must, after all this, have Christ, the Lord, for the true shepherd, who gives you his fullness and riches, and you must be fed, pastured and saved by him.

16. Thus you rightly fulfill both offices, and correctly distinguish the doctrine of works from the doctrine of faith – we are to keep the Law, but not trust in it; for faith alone will keep us and comfort us with Christ’s pasture. So, works rest upon the obligation of the Law, and faith upon grace in Christ.

III. THE THIRD CLASS OF PREACHERS, IN WHOM ALONE CHRIST IS FOUND

17. Now, where the door is opened to the shepherd and he enters, the sheep receive comfort and help; as Christ says at the lose of our Gospel lesson: “I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.” For as Christ rules, guides and leads them, feeds and keeps them, he

works in them through his Word and the power of the Holy Spirit, and they grow daily, becoming richer in knowledge, stronger in faith. in consolation, in patience, having victory in suffering and other trials, and of themselves bear fruit, teaching, serving and helping others. And thus the office and work of the shepherd, whose own the sheep are, go on continually, when he himself receives the sheep and works his will in them, which he does by his voice, that is, the external Word and preaching.

18. Therefore, Christ calls himself the door by which the sheep go in and out. For, as he is the shepherd and also the sermon through which he comes to us and by which he is made known, so faith in our hearts, by which his power and work are experienced, is simply Christ dwelling and working in us, making us in our life and work complete in him. So all goodness goes forth from him and is received through faith in him; we are pleasing to God only because of him, and are not dependent upon anything else, neither have we comfort from any other source.

19. With the same figure in which Christ speaks of his of-rice, which he administers through the Word, he speaks also of his sheep, telling how they are to conduct themselves in his kingdom – when the door is opened to him, they at once hear his voice and learn to know it. It is truly a comforting, cheering voice, whereby they are released from terror and fear and brought into liberty, where they can look to God in Christ for grace and all comfort. And where they once recognize this shepherd, they confidently hold to him alone and do not listen to the doctrine of any other. For they have, as the nature of sheep is, very keen ears, that respond to a very soft voice, and are very docile, recognizing and distinguishing the voice of their shepherd from all others who pose as shepherds. For now the experience of their own consciences and the witness of the Holy Spirit in their hearts testifies that no other doctrine or word can console the heart nor bring man rightly to trust in God and call upon him, except the voice of this shepherd, Christ. Therefore they reflect upon it without any doubting or wavering whatever. They do not gaze in wonder at what others teach or do, at what the world likes or the councils decree; if there were not a single person upon earth to agree with them, they would still be assured that they hear the voice of their true shepherd.

20. Yes, and they are of admirable intelligence; if they were, without fear or danger, given the choice, each pious soul would rather follow his conscience and plant himself upon Christ and his grace than upon his own works, even if he had an abundance of the latter. For of his works he is doubtful. Yea, he knows that they cannot stand before God's judgment; as David and all the saints say: "Lord, enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight no man living is righteous." Psalm 143:2. But he knows that grace is assured to him; for it is God's Word and truth.

21. What mean Christ's further words: "And he calleth his own sheep by name and leadeth them out"? All hear the harmonious voice of Christ – the preaching of the Gospel: faith, baptism, hope and salvation they all have in common and in equal measure. The grace that Magdalene has is the same as that of the Virgin Mary, and that of Peter the same as the dying thief experienced.

22. But there is a difference when he begins to call by special names those who are in the same grace; as a shepherd has special marks for each sheep and calls one “Brownie,” another “Blackie,” or such names as he will. Likewise Christ produces special works in each individual when he comforts, admonishes, and helps him in his needs and cares, through his Word. Also he distributes to men his gifts: to one a stronger faith than to another, or more understanding; gifts to teach and explain the Scriptures, to preach, to rule. Again, he uses an individual for a special work, to accomplish more and greater things than another; he visits one with much suffering and another with little; he extended the Gospel farther through Paul than through the other apostles; he called Peter and led him to suffer in a different way than he did John.

23. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, says: “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit,” etc. As in the same house there are many kinds of work, many occupations, but all the workers are members of the same family, having the same kind of food; and as there are many members in the same body and each has its special work and use, and yet all are of the same body and the same in health, deriving a common pleasure from the food and nourishment: so in Christ’s kingdom there are many kinds of gifts, of works and sufferings, distributed to each according to his capacity and calling; but all are sheep of the same kind, sharing all his blessings, and one is as dear to him as another. He says further:

“He leadeth them out. When he has put forth all his own, he goeth before them” etc.

24. This leading them out is, as I said, Christian liberty. They are now free; no longer penned up and captive under anxious constraint and fear of the Law and of divine judgment, but happily pastured and nourished in Christ’s sweet kingdom of grace. Of this liberty St. Paul says: “Ye are not under law, but under grace.” Romans 6:14. Again he says: “Now that faith is come, we are no longer under a tutor.” Galatians 3:25.

25. This liberty does not mean that the sheep may now without a fold and without a keeper run from their shepherd unrestrained into error; or that Christians can do whatever the flesh lusteth for. But it means that, now free from terror and fear of wolves, thieves and murderers, they may live with their dear shepherd, in love and pleasure following where he leads and guides; because they know that he so defends and lovingly oversees them that the Law dare no more accuse and condemn them, even though they are weak as to the flesh and have not perfectly fulfilled the Law.

26. For here the Lord, God’s Son, is the shepherd, who takes the sheep under his grace, his shelter and protection; and he who will accuse or condemn the sheep, must first accuse or condemn the Lord himself. Paul gloriously and defiantly says in Romans 8:1: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,” etc.; likewise in verses and 34: “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” This is, I say, freedom of conscience – freedom from the condemnation of the Law. Now that we are in Christ, the Law

has no claim on us, for the material, bodily life has no place here. It has its own external government and law, unrelated to spiritual life in the kingdom of Christ.

“When he hath put forth all his own, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him.”

27. That is the Christians’ life under their shepherd. Christ ever rules, leads and guides them. They remain with him in the liberty of faith, wherein they walk, following his example in obedience and good works, of which example Peter says: Christ has “left you an example, that ye should follow his steps.” 1 Peter 2:21. And Christ himself says in John 13:15: “I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you.” Christ’s kingdom, as I said, was not instituted that we might indulge the lusts of our flesh; but that we, released from the captivity of the Law, under which we could not in sincerity do anything good, follow Christ forward cheerfully and with a good conscience in our lives and works. And each responds as Christ calls him, a special instrument for Christ’s use.

28. To follow the advancing Christ means that our whole lives and all our works be in the faith of Christ – a constant exercise of faith, wherein we recognize and are assured that because of this dear shepherd we have favor with God. Thus our works and lives, weak and imperfect in obedience as they are, are also under the wings of the mother hen, and are pleasing to God because of the shepherd. In this confidence we now begin to be obedient, to call upon him in our temptations and needs, to confess his Word and serve our neighbors. And thus, both in the inner and the outer life – which Christ here calls “going out and in” – we are to find pasture; that is, comfort, strength, help, the increase of faith, and everything good. To this end a Christian constantly needs the Word of Christ as his daily bread; he needs to learn from it and to exercise himself in it. Therefore, Christ says again, in concluding his words on the sheep that follow him:

“For they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers.”

29. That means, they know now how to keenly distinguish doctrine, faith and life; for they have the standard of the Word, which teaches them to cling alone to this shepherd, and thus be enabled to rightly judge everything offered to them and shun and condemn that which directs and leads them otherwise. Therefore, under this shepherd they abide indeed safe, undeceived and rightly led; they are excellent, intelligent, well sheltered, contented, secure and blessed sheep.

30. Notice that this parable pictures so beautifully to us Christ and his sheep that we see the inner life of his kingdom and the treasure we have from him. And it finely symbolizes how we should teach the Law and faith and works in the Church. But the Pharisees and their blind leaders and the false saints understand naught of this; as John here says:

“But they understand not what things they were which he spoke unto them.”

31. Yes, although Christ even interprets and illustrates these things in plain words, yet his hearers do not understand them. They consider and estimate his words from the low plane of their own reason, which learns nothing beyond the doctrine of the law of works, and seeks the

fulfillment of the same by its own strength; as Paul, in Romans 10:3, says of them: They seek to establish their own righteousness, and do not subject themselves to the righteousness that avails before God. Hence, when they hear the doctrine of our salvation, how our lives must be hid in Christ alone and nothing avails without him, they begin to blaspheme; as they say of him at the end of this sermon in verse 20: “He hath a demon, and is mad; why hear ye him?” So in our day they revile the doctrine of faith as heresy, and say that we forbid good works; but thereby they candidly reveal their own blindness – they do not understand what Christ, faith and good works are.

32. We, however, who have – God be praised! – the true knowledge, should learn from this Gospel two things: First, that nothing should be taught in Christendom except that which pertains to this one shepherd, Christ – and every individual should guard against all that does not point to him for enlightenment of the conscience and for strengthening the hope of salvation; or that is not enjoined and commanded as necessary to keep. Therefore, Christ calls himself the door, through whom alone we must go out and in; and true doctrine and faith, and life proceed only from him, lead to him and are found in him.

33. The second truth is that all Christians have the power and right to pass judgment upon any doctrine, and to turn from false preachers and bishops, refusing obedience to them. For you hear in this Gospel that Christ says of his sheep: “My sheep hear my voice, and a stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of the stranger.” The reason Christians can rightly judge is because they apply the standard – as I mentioned – from this Word of Christ, that all who fail to teach Christ are thieves and murderers. These words have already passed the judgment and further knowledge than that of Christ is unnecessary. Christians, then, are in duty bound to follow this judgment, fleeing and avoiding all it contains, it matters not who, how wise or how many they are.

34. Here are deposed from their office and power those who wish to rule in the Church and yet do not teach Christ’s Words but their own commands, and who require the people to obey them as bishops occupying the appointed seats of authority in the Church. So it is the duty of Christ’s sheep to follow Christ’s judgment, holding such teachers as dethroned, condemned and excommunicated from the Church of Christ, and fleeing from them as accursed. And they who wish to remain godly, and Christ’s true sheep, should never yield this power and fight of judgment, nor permit themselves to indorse, accept or follow what others may decree, contrary to its teaching, be they pope, bishop or councils.

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