

Follow Your Good Shepherd – John 10:1-10

- 1) He is as good as the Bible says
- 2) Follow only him

Life is full of twists and turns that keep you on your toes. Because just when you think you know what's going on, life happens and you need to follow someone's good guidance. I remember when I was learning how to drive, how I followed a number of people's good guidance. There was my parent's good guidance that I needed to look at the road from the driver's side instead of the passengers. So that when I drive I should be close to the middle of the road, not on the far edge trying to clip off the side mirrors of the parked cars. Thankfully I followed my parent's good guidance before anyone lost a side mirror. There was my older brother's good guidance that when I turn my head to check my blind spot, I shouldn't turn the steering wheel with it. Thankfully I followed his good guidance before I drove over any curbs. Then there was the good guidance from my driver's ed teacher about highway driving. First that even if the road is wide open ahead of you, you still need to be around the speed limit. Second that I need to keep space behind the car ahead of me since braking takes longer when cruising at 75 miles per hour. It's because I followed these people's good guidance that I haven't been at fault in an accident with another car.

With today being Confirmation Sunday, I'll be drawing a lot of attention to our confirmands – Jacob Miller and Brandon Walshaw. While I know the two of you haven't learned how to drive yet, I pray that when you do you follow the good guidance that's given to you. It's important to follow good advice for a bunch of reasons. It saves us from having to learn by making fools of ourselves or hurting someone. You guys will soon be feeling one of life's twists and turns as you go from being the senior class in grade school to a lowly freshman in high school. It's going to be different and challenge you in ways you didn't expect. Although that's still a few months off, follow the good guidance that's given to you by your parents so you can start off high school on the right foot. But also, don't forget to follow the good guidance of your Good Shepherd. He is really as good as the Bible says he is. And follow only him as you begin a new chapter in your life.

We call Jesus the Good Shepherd because it's clear how much better he is than all of the other shepherds, that is, the religious teachers, of his time. In the verses before John chapter 10, Jesus performs a miracle by restoring the sight of a man who had been blind since birth. The Pharisees had a big problem with this miracle because Jesus had done it on the Sabbath, the day of rest when you weren't supposed to do any work. After investigating it, the Pharisees excommunicated the once blind man from the synagogue. Their message to the town was clear – they would not put up with Jesus or his teachings. And it's to this audience of Pharisees,

regular Jews, and the once blind man that Jesus tells his figure of speech. To illustrate what a good shepherd does for his sheep.

In Jesus' figure of speech, he uses a sheep pen where a shepherd would house his flock for the night. Comparing it to something today, a sheep pen is like a corral built out of stone. There was no roof so the stone walls had to be built high enough to keep out the wild animals. There was only one gate to the sheep pen which was guarded by either a shepherd or a watchman. Listen to how Jesus describes what happens when a good shepherd comes to sheep pen. **"The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. 3 The watchman 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."**

Although Jesus doesn't say that he's the Good Shepherd until verse 11, we can see him at this good shepherd in every detail. How he knows us by name. How he leads us and goes ahead of us. And how we follow him because we know his voice. Brandon, Jacob, have you thought about that? That not only does Jesus know that you're about to be confirmed, but that he also knows your name and what makes you uniquely you? That he's not distant and far off, leaving you helpless to navigate through life's twists and turns, but that he leads you and goes ahead of you in this world? That you get to listen to God himself and actually know what he's thinking as he speaks to you through the Bible? As a good shepherd knows his flock and leads them on the safe path to avoid danger on every side, so Jesus is your Good Shepherd. As a flock can pick out their shepherd's voice from all the other shepherds coming to the sheep pen, so you can pick out what Jesus says to you in his Word. And as Jesus shows you, he is the shepherd who is indeed good.

But do you always believe that? Will you continue to call Jesus your Good Shepherd when life throws its twists and turns at you in the years to come? High school's coming. Friends, clubs, and teams will compete for your time like never before. When those groups pry you away from your Savior because he isn't good enough for your time on Sunday or during the week, will you follow your Good Shepherd? From the year I've had the two of you in Catechism class, I can tell that neither of you right away believe everything a teacher says to you. You need to ask questions and reason first. While that's not necessarily a bad thing, what will you do when voices of reason speak against God's Word? That the earth is billions of years and Genesis is wrong? That God is happy as long as we try our hardest instead of what James chapter 2 says, that even if we only break the law in one point, we're guilty of death in hell? Will you continue to call your Shepherd good? As you learn new things and see that what you knew as a child isn't the full answer, will you doubt the truths that you have known since infancy? That Jesus is your Good Shepherd?

I pray that the two of you remain strong in your faith and continue to follow your Good Shepherd as you've shown me and your spiritual family here at Grace Lutheran. I pray that as you go through life's twists and turns, you never forget or fail to appreciate how wonderful your Good Shepherd is. He has spoken to you in his Word, the Bible. He tells you without a hint of doubt that he has led the way and fought the battle for sin for you. Because of his perfect life, he is indeed good. Because of his innocent death to pay the price for your sins, he is as good as the Bible says. Because of his resurrection from the dead, we call him good since he given you the sure promise of eternal life. Jesus guides you through life's twists and turns to keep you on the safe path and to avoid spiritual pitfalls. He knows you by name and who you are. He knows what you like and what you need. Jesus didn't fail you when he died on the cross. He will never fail you. So follow your Good Shepherd.

Follow only him for he is the only gate to eternal life. After Jesus got done pointing out how he is the Good Shepherd, the people he was speaking to were a little lost. Maybe because they didn't understand what Jesus was trying to communicate. Maybe because the Pharisees didn't want to admit they weren't the good shepherds for God's people they claimed to be. So Jesus changes gears a little bit and speaks more directly. **"I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep....whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture."** Using the layout of a sheep pen, if you wanted to get in or out of it there was only one way – the gate where there was someone guarding it. If you want to get to the safety and comfort of the sheep pen, you need to go through Jesus. In John chapter 14, Jesus says all the more clearly **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** This is why it's so important to only follow your Good Shepherd. If you follow him, you receive life. If you don't follow him, it's to your death.

Brandon, Jacob, as you'll find out if you haven't already, that message isn't too liked by the world. That if you want to get to heaven, you can only do it through faith in Jesus as your Savior from sin. You have science and higher education which is quick to say that there's no such thing as God. Or at the very least, no such thing as Jesus the Good Shepherd who gave his life for you. There are multitudes of other religions that say that when Jesus died on the cross, it wasn't finished! It's up to you to live a good life to tip the cosmic balance of good works and bad actions in your favor. There are people who say *"There are many gates and paths to heaven. You follow yours and I'll follow mine. And we'll meet up in heaven."* As good as that sounds, don't let it confuse you. There is only one gate to heaven and his name is Jesus. Anyone who says differently is one of these thieves and robbers who climb over the stone walls to get into the sheep pen. And as Jesus tells us, they aren't there to help you. No, they are there to **"steal and kill and destroy."** So don't follow them. Follow your Good Shepherd and only follow him.

Value God's Word as your Good Shepherd tells you – the only source for spiritual truth. The lessons you've learned in Sunday School and Catechism class are timeless truths through all of life's twists and turns. As it has been a foundational part of your youth, keep it a foundational part in your life going forward. Just because you are getting confirmed today doesn't mean you're done studying the Bible. Confirmation Sunday is a big deal because it's when Grace Lutheran will invite you to receive Holy Communion. But it's your graduation from studying the Bible. It's a stepping stone to the next part of your Christian education. As you continue your regular schooling by going to high school, so you'll continue your ongoing Christian schooling by going to Bible study. Make every effort to come to Lifeliners events and Bible studies as you did for Catechism class.

Go to God's Word and listen to your Good Shepherd. Recognize it when your Savior is talking to you so that you can flee from the bad shepherds who will trash the faith you have now. Many times these false prophets will say they're speaking God's Word and may even cite Scripture's words to back up their wrong ideas. But you have the Holy Spirit to understand God's spiritual truths. You have a sure knowledge of what God teaches in the Bible through your classes so far. You have the Good Shepherd's own words to compare what people claim God teaches. So get comfortable with it and use it. Follow your Good Shepherd. He is as good as the Bible says. Brandon, Jacob, and all of us, follow your Good Shepherd and only him. He is your only gate to a life full of peace and joy made possible by the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, your Savior. Amen.