

May 7, 2017
Fourth Sunday After Easter
John 10:1-10

Next month I'm going to Birmingham on vacation. If I need to get to Birmingham, how important to me is my plane ticket from Houma to Birmingham? It's kind of important, but is it all-important? Not really. If I lose my plane ticket, I could always just drive, right? If my Jeep breaks down I could use Bridgette's Lexus. If both cars are toast, there's a Greyhound bus that stops at the quickie mart on Lafayette Street three times a week. I could ride my bike, hitch-hike or just plain walk to Birmingham. The plane ticket? Really not that critical.

So how important is the Gospel of Jesus Christ? I'm pretty sure everyone in this room would agree it's pretty important. But is it all-important? That's a very different question, and one I believe many in the visible Christian church today would have trouble at agreeing on an affirmative answer.

You see, while many would never admit it to their pastor, a great number of North American Christians believe that, although they follow Christ, a good person who is not of their faith could indeed still go to heaven. This is the case. I'm pretty positive there are folks sitting in this room this very moment who believe this.

Such a belief is completely unbiblical. Jesus makes the point in the parable before us today. *"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."* He's pretty clear that life is through Him alone and any other way is death and destruction. A few verses prior in this same conversation with the now-seeing man born blind and some Pharisees He said *"For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."* That's a pretty clear way of saying the guy

believing in Jesus sees and is saved but the “good, law-abiding” Pharisees who don’t believe are blind and damned.

And it doesn’t get any clearer than a few chapters beyond this on the night of the Lord’s Supper when Jesus says, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* There is no life apart from Christ, only damnation. He is THE good shepherd. His Gospel is all-important.

I’m not bringing this up for the sake of all the good people not of our faith who aren’t saved. Yes, you should view them with compassionate eyes and see that they are perishing. Yes, you should tell them about Jesus Christ the good shepherd. Yes, you should shine your faith like a beacon on a hill that others might see your good works and glorify the Father in heaven and the Savior sitting at His right hand. But I actually am emphasizing this for your benefit.

You see, if you as a Christian believe that a “good person” gets to heaven apart from Christ, how important does that make YOUR savior? Doesn’t that kind of make Him like my plane ticket to Birmingham—important, but I can make it there without Him? After all, you’re a pretty good person, right?

This is really dangerous thinking, because by virtue of your Holy Baptism into Christ, you’re a sheep of the Good Shepherd. You’re in His sheep pen. He is the door by which you entered and He is the door by which you go to find your pasture—are saved and have life and have it abundantly. But like Peter writes in our epistle today, the door that is Christ in this life often comes with suffering, sacrifice and hardship. The Gospel and those who live in it are not always honored in the world. Sometimes this Gospel costs.

If you think there is another way for a “good person”, if the cost of discipleship gets high, won’t a “good person” be tempted to take an alternate route? Sure you will. The fact is, I’m not

flying to Birmingham; it costs \$1100 and with connecting flights it takes like ten hours. The cost is too high. I choose to drive instead.

The only alternate routes to Jesus don't lead to green pastures; don't lead to life and salvation. These are the thief who steals and kills and destroys.

If flying was the only way and I had to be in Birmingham, I'd pay whatever it took. Likewise, when we know and believe the truth, Jesus is THE way and THE truth and THE life, we seek no other shepherd. We value the Shepherd we have above all things, for there is no other way. There can't be. Not if your Christian faith is true.

Jesus Christ Himself, the very Son of God, prayed in the garden that there might be some other way, but God's will be done. But He had to go to the cross. Why? Because there was nobody, not one in all humanity, who was a "good person," "a good enough person" to get to heaven apart from His death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins. He had to die and rise that He would be the door through death to victory and life for those who are His sheep. And we are only His sheep by God's grace of calling us to faith in, and only in, Christ crucified.

Believe Christ is all-important, because He is. That is the take away today. Believe Christ is all-important because if you don't, the opportunity has been created to competition to be your Shepherd, your door to the kingdom. And you don't make good choices because you're a "good person." You make sinful choices because you're not.

You ever wake up on a Sunday morning and toy with the idea of sleeping in because, well, you don't really need to go to church? I mean, just pause a minute and consider the thinking that just has to be behind that! How important is Christ?

Or have you ever settled into the pew on Sunday and thought about so-and-so who isn't here in worship again and thought, "Well, I'm here so they should be also!" as if your attendance

is the noble work being done on Sunday? How important is Christ? The Christ present here in Word and Sacrament giving poor beggars the undeserved fruits of His suffering and bloodshed?

Those are just a couple Sunday morning temptations. The world is loaded with endless other important things to compete with Christ being all-important. Don't fall for it. Know, believe, in He who is all-important.

He is all-important because He is the Good Shepherd. He has saved you, His sheep. He has called you, His sheep. And despite your frailties and missteps in following Him, He is present to continue keeping you safe, forgiven and refreshed in your faith.

“For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” “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.”

This is you. You're right here, right now, hearing His voice in His Word and receiving Him as He comes to you in His body and blood. The eternal peace and life to which this door leads stands today as your present possession. There is no better gift. And there is no other way.

Believe Jesus is all-important to you.