

Alleluia, Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Jesus encountered the man he had healed, the man born blind after he was cast out of the synagogue. And Jesus asked him if he believed in the Son of Man. “Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus replied, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” And the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and worshiped Jesus. Jesus declared that he came to give sight to the blind and to blind those who claim to see.

Some Pharisees near Him heard and asked, “Are we also blind?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains. 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.”

Jesus says that not only are they blind, but they are thieves and robbers. They attempt to access the Lord’s sheepfold through ways God has not given. And so, even though their lives may sparkle with outward holiness, they really are nothing but deceivers and violent men. They did not trust the goodness of the Lord, so they seek to take the Kingdom and its riches for themselves.

But the Pharisees are not alone in this endeavor. People try to climb into the Lord’s sheepfold all the time through various ladders: their own good works or charity, their mystical experiences, or even their knowledge of divine truth. But *no one* gets into the sheepfold by climbing over the walls. The Law hedging the sheepfold is insurmountable, for no one conceived by man is holy. No, not even one.

Instead, the only way into the sheepfold is through the door right there at ground level, right there where you are. And “He who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens.” And who is this gatekeeper? St. John Chrysostom suggests that it is Moses, the one to whom God had revealed His law. The Law guarding the Lord’s sheepfold is insurmountable, but in order to get through the door, you have to get past the Law-giver himself.

For the sinner, there seems to be no hope of gaining access to the Kingdom of God. And yet there is one to whom Moses opens, the very Shepherd of the sheep. “The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” The sheep then also are able freely to go in and out of the sheepfold with their Shepherd.

But who are these sheep who walk with their shepherd? Beloved in the Lord, you know. For the Lord claimed you as His own. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree,” Peter writes, “that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

Christ gave His own life for you so that you may be part of His fold. Not because He doesn’t know you. Not because He doesn’t understand the sinner that you are. No, believed, He understands your sin more than you ever will, and even still, He loves you. He knows every hair on your head. He knows every cell in your body. For He made you, and He made you to be His own, to live with Him in His own Kingdom. And your sin does not change His love for you.

So He Himself came into this fallen world to seek you. He kept the Law perfectly and then took your sin upon Himself to pay what the Law demands. And then He called you by name as His under-shepherd poured water over your head and baptized you into His name. By doing so, He united you with His own crucified and risen flesh so that His righteousness may become your own. And He gave you faith to believe His Word. And as you spend time with the Shepherd in His Word, in your devotions and study, as His faithful under-shepherds proclaim and teach it to you, and as your fellow sheep encourage and support you through it, you learn to hear and know His voice more and more.

“When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” As you hear and follow His voice, you can go in and out of the sheepfold without fear. For

the Law is no obstacle to one with Jesus the Shepherd. And as you go out, you have nothing to fear because Christ goes before you to lead you. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

Outside the sheepfold, there is no doubt danger lurking everywhere. There are lions and wolves hungry to snatch up any sheep they can. But as you walk through this valley, your Shepherd goes before you. But that is why it is so important to spend time with the Shepherd, to hear His Word over and over so that you know His voice by heart. “A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”

There are many eager to deceive you and lead you astray, to lead you out of the safety of the Shepherd. They do so for their own gain, in their own blindness, and even for the sake of the one who hates you because you are the Shepherd’s lamb. Many false teachers, blind in their sin yet claiming to see, fill the valley. Like the Pharisees, they may even seem to sparkle in holiness, overflowing with knowledge of the Scripture, but really they are nothing more than deceitful and violent men doing the work of the devil. Do not listen to them. Always test a word by the Word of the Shepherd, and if the one speaking is speaking a different message, then flee from him and back to the Shepherd who oversees your soul.

As you know the Shepherd’s voice they cannot lead you astray. As you follow the Shepherd you go in and out and find green pasture. To go in is to go by faith, to believe the promises of Christ that restore your soul. To go out is to work, to serve your neighbor in love and righteousness. Whether going in by faith or going out in love, Christ always leads us with His voice. He leads us to His table, where our cup overflows with His abundant life, full of goodness and mercy. For that is why our Lord, the Good Shepherd has come, that we may dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.