

John 10:1-10

¹Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

John 10:1-10, 2017

It is said that sometimes a text, or a story has no meaning without a context,

and that stories shape us as much as we shape the story.

We can be shaped by a story through our interpretation and incarnation of its truth,

or the way we give life to that truth revealed in the story as it shapes our life.

How truth is revealed to the world is by the way it shapes our life,

SO

The context of this passage is found in the preceding story and this one shapes the texts that follow.

10:14-16, 11:1-44 raising of Lazarus, 14:6, 12:20ff,

This passage is the closest thing John gets to a parable in his gospel.

Lets put this passage in its context, and to figure all that out you have to go back to the beginning of chapter 9.

There you find the story of the man born blind who Jesus healed by spitting in the dirt, making mud and rubbing it on the man's eyes; and the blind man could see!

After that the man and his parents were summoned to appear before the Pharisees so that they could try to discredit Jesus or find fault with him.

The story lays out a journey of faith, or better yet a journey to faith for the man who was born blind.

In the process the man is run out of the synagogue!

Jesus goes to find him and asks,

“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

and the story reaches its pentacle with the man
proclaiming

“Lord, I believe!” and he worships Jesus

Immediately Jesus tells us this parable.

Jesus goes into this brief discourse using a number of metaphors, all of which point to himself and makes this passage very confusing.

The befuddlement of the passage serves a purpose;

it redirects your attention away from the distracters
like the Pharisees and into the subtlety that is so
obvious that it could be dismissed as too simple.

That subtlety is in the 10th verse:

“I have come that they may have life and have it
abundantly.”

This is Jesus’ vision for all people.

This is Jesus’ vision for the blind man who he calls to belief and who then enters the fold, and the Pharisees who continue to fight with him.

He calls all people to come just as the shepherd calls the
sheep and they follow.

Jesus doesn’t call just one sheep, but the entire flock to protect,
feed, to free from fear, to keep together and to provide abundant
life.

This is our cue about the priority of community for Jesus and the imperative that the church be known by its union with him;

a community with its many parts bound to him

As I was looking through some magazines that had piled up on my desk one article caught my attention,

and my first thought was that it pointed to a current day theme that I believe is surprisingly relevant to this text.

In this article Mark Galli makes the case that identity churchmanship tears apart the unity of the church

just as identity politics tears apart the unity of our society.

He drives home the fact that in the church we who are shaped by our faith in God's word and the resurrection of Jesus are united in Christ and Christ alone.

We are united as the many parts of one body as St. Paul describes in his letters to the churches.

Galli makes the observation that identity politics that really took off in the 1960s with the racial identity of the civil rights movement has served a valuable purpose in our society.

We see it play out in terms of gender, sexual orientation, disability and many other identities as the awareness, rights and care for those segments of our communities have been served.

But, as pendulums do swing he questions if the pendulum is beginning to swing back in the other direction.

You see, identity politics does not possess the tools to pull us back together, to unite us,

and neither does identity churchmanship

Identity churchmanship promotes a self identification based on what we value about ourselves and the cultural things we have in common with others;

gender, work, likes and dislikes, a common causes you advocate for and work for with others.

Galli lists these observations that might shape identity churchmanship:

The racial makeup of the congregation, how people are dressed, the quality of the cars in the parking lot, age demographic,

assuming if young it's vibrant and if old, Anglican.

Liturgical correctness, how much paper is wasted on bulletins.

Here are a couple of problems with identity churchmanship:

First it seems to inevitably lead to inappropriate judgment and division.

Galli shares the tendency to look down our nose at those things and people who don't match our vision of how things ought to be.

and second, it encourages us to notice what is passing away while failing to notice the reality that will last:

and what will last is the depth that lies at the heart of the Good News of Jesus CHrist,

that we are people in whom the resurrected Christ lives as St. Paul tells us in Ephesians 3:17.

We heard in last week's Acts reading the people ask "What shall we do?" after hearing Peter's sermon.

He said be baptized and your sins will be forgiven and you will receive the Holy Spirit

who is identified with Jesus, as the Spirit of Christ.

This is the reality that drives our understanding of Christ in our lives and our world today, and it is no small matter.

It is crucial because it reorients us, helping us see ourselves in a new light.

It clarifies our real, deepest, and lasting identity

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." Gal. 2:20

Because of this we are unified in the deepest part of ourselves with one another,

regardless of how you may feel about those around you.

Yet, at the same time we don't agree, and don't have to agree, on everything inside or outside the church.

We don't all think the exact same thing about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit.

We do not all have the same priorities, interests, political point of view, or world view.

What connects us to one another and to the two billion Christians around the world with all our differences in languages, customs, beliefs and hopes,

is baptism.

In baptism we are all joined to Christ, our source of unity.

Jesus forms community from disparate entities, from people of all sorts and all places.

I said before that this passage shapes the text that follows.

If you read on in Chapter ten Jesus says,

I have other sheep that don't belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice." 10:16

We then read the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead, in which Jesus says to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, though they die, will live..." 11:1-44 raising of Lazarus

No one is excluded from the possibility of promise.

In chapter 12 some Greeks come to Jerusalem to see Jesus only days before his death.

Next week we will hear these words from Jesus,

"I am the way the truth and the life." assuring all who believe that they have a home with him for all eternity. 14:6,

This is abundant life.

The contemporary view of abundant life may include;

a purposeful vocation that serves the common good,
participation in a productive church community

delight in sustaining relationships,

and a sense of security in Christ no matter what comes,

and these are all good things.

Beyond that though, I believe the abundance of life Jesus intends for us

- is realized in our unity with him and the depth of that relationship that touches every part of our lives.
- Being a part of something much greater than yourself to carry out God's mission in the world
- Being in relationships with others that are loving, nurturing and caring despite our differences.

Throughout John's gospel Jesus claims to provide the essentials of abundant life:

water, bread of life, light of the world, shelter for the sheepfold.

If you pay too much attention to the material aspects and elements,

your head will blind your heart to the pleasant aspect of the life imagined in Psalm 23.

In the midst of danger and death there is good green grass in the pasture to lie down in, still waters to walk along, restoration for your soul,

But it is made possible only in the presence of the good shepherd Jesus who takes away fear, gives comfort, feeding, anointing, goodness and mercy.

and a home forever.