

I am the Door of the Sheep

John 10:1-10

We are skipping John chapter 9 since we are following the teaching of Jesus and John 9 is the story of Jesus giving sight to the man who had been born blind. But, even though we are trying to do so, we really cannot skip chapter 9 since chapter 10 was spoken by Jesus in the aftermath of what he did and all that happened in chapter 9. I'm sort of glad that we can't really skip chapter 9 since it is one of my favorite chapters. It is rich in irony for man who was blind and now sees not only sees with his eyes but he also has rich spiritual insight. What he sees spiritually stands in contrast with what the religious leaders refuse to see, that Jesus, who is able to give sight to a man who was born blind, is the promised one, the Messiah who has come from God.

In the chapter this obscure soul who was regarded by all as less than a whole person is suddenly put on center stage by the circumstance of his healing. He, who before was born blind, in the minds of the religious, cursed by God from birth, is now the primary witness to the most profound of miracles, that of his own healing. So they asked him, "Are you the one who sat and begged?" "How were your eyes opened?" "Where is He (the one who healed you)?" "How did He do it?" "What do you say about Him who opened your eyes?" "Give God the glory. We know this man was a sinner." "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" "We know that God spoke to Moses. as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from..." "You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?" In answer to all of these questions the formerly blind man preached one of the most powerful sermons in the New Testament. He reasoned, The man who has given sight to a man born blind must be from God! From this simple and straightforward conclusion the blind man saw the truth and gave witness to religious leaders who refused to accept what was right in front of their noses.

The healing of the blind man and the teaching of Jesus about the Good Shepherd took place at the Feast of Dedication or as we call it now, Hanukkah. The Feast commemorates the rededication of the temple under the Maccabees when they regained control of it from Antiochus Epiphanes. The eight days of lighting candles celebrates the miracle of the candles burning for eight days when they only had enough fuel for one day. There is a pause between chapters 9 and 10 but the principals are still present. Jesus, the religious leaders, the disciples, and the aura of the miracle of the healing of the blind man, these are the things in the air as Jesus begins to teach.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens and the sheep hear his voice and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

What was Jesus' story about? Start with the sheep. One man described a middle eastern shepherd's encampment in which a large number of sheep were within the circumference of the tents of many shepherds where they spent the night. In the morning, each of the shepherds called their own flocks out of the center and led them off. When all of the shepherds had left, so had all of the sheep. A more recent story is of a Palestinian woman whose sheep along with many others had been confiscated by the Israeli army after a terrorist attack. When she convinced the authorities that she was harmless she asked permission to call her sheep out of the many who were penned up. The Israeli officer was skeptical but gave permission and then she had her young son play his flute and you could see the ears of certain sheep perk up. Soon they came to the boy and he led about 25 sheep of the many out of the pen and down the street. This is what Jesus was describing. The sheep know the voice of their own shepherd. The shepherd exists to care for his sheep. There is this bond between the shepherd and the sheep who are his. If anyone else tries to call them, they won't come. They only

follow their own shepherd. The thing that distinguishes their own shepherd from any other is that he is the one who truly cares for them.

Jesus had just healed the blind man. He became Jesus' sheep. The religious leaders like the thieves and robbers of the story tried everything to turn the man away from Jesus. They tried to cast doubt as to Jesus' motives and authority. They tried to claim that when Jesus healed him it was evidence that He was of the devil. What the blind man knew was that these men had never shown any interest in him at all. Even now, when he had just been healed, they did not care that his life had been changed. They did not share in his excitement over the visual stimulus that he had never before experienced, seeing, to him had only been theoretical until now. What he understood deep within was that these people did not care about him at all. But Jesus had cared. He reached out and recognized his personhood when no one else could see it. He put the clay on his eyes and sent him to wash it off with the certainty that he was capable of doing so. He gave him the opportunity to participate in his own healing. He respected him. He continued to treat him with love and kindness. Jesus had no need to get the blind man to do or say this or that in order to prove something to anyone. Jesus' gift of healing was free and it was for the blind man and for all who loved the truth. Jesus was the shepherd who cared and the blind man was the sheep who knew His voice and who followed Him.

Jesus continued, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

What was Jesus saying with this? Notice - "All who came before Me are thieves and robbers..." There is the shepherd who truly cares for His flock, knowing the sheep by name, and there are the thieves and robbers who only want to use the sheep to benefit themselves. Every leader they knew before Jesus was a thief and a robber. The religious leaders used the people. They did not serve the people.

Jesus served the people. He labored long and exhaustingly caring for each individual. He taught for hours and hours seeking to help the people to get it. What He had done for the blind man He had done for many. His passion was for the sheep who had no shepherd - until they encountered Him! How many stories could have been told? Men and women who like the blind man discovered their true shepherd, the one whose voice they recognized and who they then confidently followed. Hear Jesus' words as the blind man must have, "I am come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." What life did he have before Jesus? What kind of a life did he have after Jesus? This is all we need to know.