

Pr. Justin Eller – Assistant to the Bishop for Latine Ministries, Southeastern Synod  
Easter 4B John 10:22-30 – Year C  
Sunday, May 8, 2022

Good morning church! I bring you greetings on behalf of Bishop Kevin Strickland, your Southeastern Synod Staff, and your fellow disciples across Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee. I'm Pastor Justin Eller, Assistant to the Bishop for Latine Ministry Initiatives and Associate Pastor at Amazing Grace Lutheran Church in Lawrenceville, Georgia, and I'm excited to be with you in God's word today!

So, today is the 4TH SUNDAY OF EASTER and it's often called, "*Good Shepherd Sunday*" because of the gospel readings that are appointed. As I read today's gospel verses in the whole context of chapter 10, I'm reminded of the time when my wife and I visited a congregation in Montana. One of the members of the congregation, we'll call him "Dan", was a cattle rancher and farmer. He asked if we wanted to go with him and his new dog-in-training to round up some heifers and their calves so they could be tagged. We agreed and headed into the BadLands of western North Dakota. We get to the ranch and we're riding with Dan in his truck to herd the cattle when ALL OF A SUDDEN, he throws it in park, flings open his door, jumps out, and hollers, "HEP DOG! HEP!" //

While Dan scared the *you-know-what* out of me, he mortified his new dog who was hiding behind my seat. He yelled it again... "HEP DOG, HEP!" The poor thing covered and curled tighter into a little ball, shivering with fear. Dan laughed, "*It's alright baby, maybe next time.*" And he looked at me and said "*She's still a city dog.*" //

About that time he realized his cows were getting away and since his city dog was hiding he said, "*alright y'all, it's your turn! Now you stand here by the open gate and I'm gonna' run these 100 and some cows and calves in this little part of the pen and when I say go, I want you to SHOO them into the big pen. Make a lot of noise and kinda scare 'em in...but I gotta warn ya, DON'T separate a momma from her baby.*"

"Sure, fine, yea, we got this," I told him as I looked over at my wife with *that* look...you know the one that says without words, *what have we gotten ourselves into*. He gets the cows going and yells, "NOW, open the gate, get them in."

So here's where I have to tell you that before this experience I thought cows only moored, OH NO, NO...a momma cow who feels threatened and her calf is vulnerable can GROWL like a *hangry* bear! So, these 100 plus growling cows were staring at me, the new temporary herding dog, the stranger. And do you think they listened to me...HA!

As they all came rushing at me, Dan hollered again, *"Don't let them get past you and don't separate them."* Sure enough I had a calf cornered away from the mother. Funny thing is: you can tell which mother a calf belongs to, because the more the calf hollered, the more the mother wailed and paced frantically by the fence, trying to get to her distressed calf. AND is it not true, that, as parents, we can tell which kid is ours that's crying even from the other side of the noisy building?! // Well the calf was scared, / the momma was scared and growling / and I was scared. I let out a yelp as I fled the charging cows, "Dan, I think I might be a city dog too!" // and I confess that I left my wife out there to successfully reunite the calf and mother 'cause, well she's braver than me. //

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That day, I was not a good shepherd, or herding dog, or even a distraction. And I can now imagine the sound of our protective God when a non-shepherd tries to separate us from God's care.

For the heifers and calves, that day, they didn't know what was about to happen...would it be: a tagging, a separation, a branding, a transporting, a slaughtering. They wouldn't know if the pin was the difference between life or death. //

In earlier verses of John chapter 10, Jesus talks about the shepherd who is trusted, not the stranger. He says, *"When [the shepherd] has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they don't know the voice of strangers."* The shepherd cares for and tends to the flock or herd. We're reminded that the true shepherd of Israel, of the church, is **God**, for *"the Lord is my shepherd, the Psalmist writes, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside quiet waters. He refreshes my soul."*

Jesus' hearers would've heard his self-identifying words as going against the unbelieving Judeans in the temple and the Temple leadership and would've drawn the connection to the critiques of the prophet Ezekiel, who called them *"lazy and self-*

*indulgent shepherds, neglecting the well-being of the sheep, dressing themselves in wool, slaughtering the fattest sheep but failing to feed the flock.”*

It's because of the bad shepherds that the sheep were scattered. Ezekiel proclaims, *“You haven't strengthened the weak, you haven't healed the sick, you haven't bound up the injured, you haven't brought back the strayed, you haven't sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them.”* And now here's Jesus, the Good Shepherd, strengthening the weak, healing the sick and injured, seeking the lost, and ruling with tenderness and compassion.

I mean just last Sunday, we heard Jesus ask Simon Peter if he loved him and with each emphatic YES LORD, YOU KNOW I LOVE YOU, Jesus instructed him to feed, and tend, and care for the Lord's flock, from the smallest lamb to the most aged sheep.  
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Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish” because earlier in chapter 5 he said that *“all those who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out.”* The sheepfold, the herd, normally a place of protection, is here equated with death. And at the call of his voice, Jesus leads his flock out from death and into eternal life.

- The man born blind responds to Jesus' voice and is healed.
- Lazarus was dead four days, but Jesus calls him by name and he comes out of his death and into life!
- Mary Magdalene, mourning Jesus' death, hears him call her name with Easter power, “Mary!” and she recognizes that she's in the presence of the risen Lord.
- Jesus calls his sheep by name and Jesus calls you and me by name! //

To the Good Shepherd, every face in a crowd of people or a herd of cattle or a flock of sheep is different, each with our own story, our own triumphs and our own tragedies.

Every face is a beloved child and every child has a name. *The shepherd knows his sheep and he knows each one by name.* The shepherd knows you and he knows **your** name, and he knows your story because it's part of his story too.

We hear God's voice. God knows us, and we follow God. This is what it means to be a disciple.

Imagine your name, right now...on Jesus' lips...calling you out with hope and love, /  
call to you with encouragement and forgiveness. //

Beloved, Jesus is calling you, by name, into real relationship: between God...and  
you...and your neighbor.

Jesus, as our Shepherd Lord, calls our name so that we'll notice him on the cross in  
the darkness and so that we'll give witness to his promised salvation in the dawn of the  
resurrection.

Jesus calls our names daily into prayer, into service with courage and humility.

Jesus calls us to come by God's side even when we're curled up in a tight ball,  
shivering with fear, because we're still figuring out this disciple thing or we're afraid of  
telling the story of how God is working on our life.

Friends, Jesus calls you to take part in his movement of mercy and love today, what  
Pope Francis has called a "global revolution of tenderness." //

So how will you respond to the Good Shepherd calling your name into the journey out  
of the gate of death and into the pasture of abundant life? //