

Renewal - Part 7

John 10:1-3, 10-18

Thief: vs. Shepherd:

steal

give

kill

life

destroy

to the full

1. Listening to Him.

2. Follow Him.

- *John 10:3b, 4, 9*

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Pentecost: Renewed Spirit¹

Nothing will get people out on a wedding reception dance floor like “Cotton-Eyed Joe” or the Cha Cha Slide – everyone starts line dancing. Sometimes it’s the Hokey-Pokey: “You put your right arm in, you put your right arm out, you put your right arm in and you shake it all about. You do the Hokey-Pokey and you turn yourself around. That’s what it’s all about!” What if the last line of the Hokey Pokey is true? What if the Hokey-Pokey *is* really what it is all about? Sometimes our lives feel a lot like one unending Hokey-Pokey dance. “You put yourself in the car, you take yourself out of the car, you put yourself in school or work, and you shake yourself about. You do the Hokey-Pokey and you turn yourself around (to do it all over again the next morning, and the morning after that). Is that what it’s all about?!?” Are you tired of your Hokey-Pokey existence? If so, I’ve got great news – God wants you to live life to the full! Today is the last in our series called “Renewed.” At Easter we were challenged to step out of our graves into Jesus’ resurrection life. But to do that, we were also challenged to take off our grave clothes and put on our new life in Christ. Throughout this series, we’ve been exploring what that renewed life looks like.

There is, of course, no shortage of people who will tell you how to live life to the full. Their voices are only a computer click away. One website I checked suggested going for a daily walk. Another said to learn a new skill. There are an endless amount of influencers on TikTok and Instagram who try to hook you with click bait that appeals to your fears or baser instincts in order to tell you what *their* opinions on your best life should be – or especially to sell you their products. The snake oil salesman never went away; he just sells off your platforms instead of out of an old wagon.

But what does Jesus say? Let’s take a look at what he said, which is really what this entire series has been about. It’s in John chapter ten. Would you help me honor God’s Word by standing? Standing also helps us focus on it more intently because we want to be sure to listen to what it says:

“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (*let me repeat that!*)

¹ Portions adapted from a sermon by Daniel Habben

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me — just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father. (John 10:1-3, 10-18, niv)

Thank you for standing – you can be seated in those nice, new, comfortable seats! You might want to keep your Bible open to this because that's where we're parking for this morning and we'll be referring to it throughout.

This is a great passage because this is where Jesus talks about the kind of life he gives us, and he does it by making the clear comparison between thieves and the Shepherd. So let's figure this out. First, who are the thieves? Jesus said it was all those who came before him. Who was that? You might think he was talking about Moses and the Prophets, but when he uses the word "before," he's not talking about chronology – those in time – he's talking about those in competition. Any voice that competes with Jesus' voice is hostile to God – that voice belongs to a thief. The ultimate thief of your life; the robber of your soul is the enemy, the devil, named Satan. He is not a myth or a metaphor; he is a real entity who's entire being is focused on your destruction. Satan hates you with every fiber of his being, and he aims to keep you away from the God who loves you with his very life.

But it can be hard to know the difference between a thief's voice and the shepherd's voice sometimes; after all, the very nature of a thief is to be deceptive. So Jesus gives us a comparison between the two. Let's look at the differences between the thief and the Good Shepherd. First, Jesus says that the thief comes to...

Steal.

What does that mean for us? To steal means to take from someone what isn't theirs. The thief doesn't have what you have, so he wants to take yours. This is most certainly true for our enemy, the devil. He does not have the blessings of God. You, on the other hand, do have God's blessings. You have life, breath, hope. You have resources. You have relationships. Whether you are a believer in Jesus or not, you are enjoying the blessings of a merciful God, even though you and I don't deserve them. The Bible says in James 1:17 that every good and perfect gift comes from God. Whatever is good in your life, you can thank God for it. So while the thief comes to steal, the Good Shepherd came to...

Give.

God gives you good things! He is a generous God, and it is his nature to give to you. All the good things in your life can be traced back to God; and that's just what you know about! There is so much more you aren't even aware of, because all God does is give.

What does it mean that the thief steals from us? Anything that steals your God-given joy, your hope, your health has the thief's fingerprints on it. Those things that steal from you can be a lot of things, but you'll know them because they are always destructive things – things that diminish your life. And for some of us, we let the thief in the front door! Selfish and self-destructive thoughts and behaviors mean we are just handing over the keys to the front door to the thief. What are those thieves for you? What is something in your life that is stealing life from you? Ask God to help you identify them. You'd better figure it out, because the thief won't stop there; the thief also comes to...

Kill.

It's not enough to take from your life; the thief wants to take your life. His entire intent is to gain access in order to destroy your life. Remember we said at Easter that if the devil can't have you dead in the grave, the next best thing is to keep you in your grave clothes. His goal in life is your death. And if you've become a Christian, then he'll try to keep you living a life that is below the spiritual poverty level. He wants to keep you enslaved and ensnared to sin. The Bible says that the wages, or the payment of sin is death (Romans 6:23). That's because, according to James 1:15, that "when desire is conceived, it gives birth to sin and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." We're not only talking about a death-soaked life here, but eternal death – separation from God forever in hell. That's where you are headed if you live your life apart from the Good Shepherd. But Jesus came to give us...

Life.

God created us; he created you. He breathed his very breath – the breath of life into you. But because of sin, you and I are spiritually dead. And that breaks God's heart because he made you for life; He wants you to be really alive – to experience all that life has for you. That's why he created us in the first place, and that's why the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ himself, gave his life – so you could have life. That's what John 3:16 says "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not die but have eternal life." Jesus came and gave his life for you so that you could have life both here and forever from here into eternity, where you will never die again.

So it's no surprise then, learning what we are about the thief, that he comes to...

Destroy.

It's not enough to make you miserable – he wants you completely and utterly destroyed. He wants to snuff you out from life for all eternity. So, for example it makes sense then that the enemy is the author of atheism – the belief that there is not God. If there's no God, there's no life – and certainly not life after death. Atheism is the lie that you cease to exist; when you die you are completely destroyed. It's the lie of Satan the thief who wants to steal from you, kill you, and utterly destroy your life, now and forever. But the Good Shepherd – he comes to give you life...

To the full.

Jesus could have stopped with the word “life” – just giving us an existence, but that's not enough to describe what God wants you to have; Jesus came to give you life to the full! That phrase “to the full” is one word in the original Greek – “perisseuo” (pear-ee-seeyou-oh). It can be translated a lot of ways; listen to just some of the ways it is translated: beyond all measure, extraordinary, extremely, abundantly, superfluous, far more, greater, exceedingly, in great excess...Do you get the idea? There is no roof to the house of your life when it comes to the quality of it that God will give you in Christ. It is life beyond description here and it lasts beyond death forever. In fact, when you die that's when really living begins! No more sin or death or sorrow – only life and love and growth and abundance, and it can start here and now! Jesus isn't kidding around. That's why the Bible says in Ephesians 3:20-21 that Jesus “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen!”

Anything that diminishes your hope, your peace, your joy, your purpose, anything that diminishes the quality and quantity of your life is the work of the thief. The abundant life Jesus gives you is beyond measure; it is full and overflowing. It doesn't mean life is always easy or isn't hard; but it will always be good. There are going to be hard times and trials, but your life *will* always be good through it all.

Now, in order to keep living this life, Jesus teaches that the way to a full life is by...

1. Listening to him.

That's why he said that his sheep listen to him and know his voice. Satan the thief would tell you that Jesus said that because He wants to keep you all tied up with his commandments while everyone else is out there having a good time and really enjoying life! But listen: the devil has been throwing out that line ever since it worked on Adam and Eve: “What do you mean God doesn't want you to eat from this tree? This is where the good stuff is, Eve. You take a bite of this fruit, and you'll feel things you've never dreamed of. Go on. Take it. God's been holding out on you. Oh

sure. He's given you this beautiful garden to live in and a husband who adores you but there's so much more to life than this paradise!" Satan is the thief Jesus described who is only interested in stealing, killing, and destroying, and he used his slick words to rob Adam and Eve of their innocence. It's the thief's age-old lie, and he's always trying to do the same thing to you too.

But that isn't how you live life to the full. Again, take inventory of your life. Are there areas of your life, your choices, your habits, your relationships, that are robbing you of joy, of abundant living? Stop listening to those voices. It might be hard to do – that voice may have been playing an endless loop in your brain. That voice tells you that you deserved every bad thing that happens to you in life. Maybe because a parent or teacher or pastor or coach told you that you were worthless. Or maybe that's the voice in your head ever since your parents divorced, or ever since you were abused as a child. Maybe the worries of the world have accumulated and amplified the voice in your head, and now it fills you with anxiety that the next shoe is going to fall any minute and more bad awaits you; it's your lot in life. **STOP LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF THE THIEF.** Start listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd who loves you as if you were the only one to love.

Listening to Jesus leads to a full life and why wouldn't it? Look at how much he loves you. He compares himself to a shepherd who calls his sheep by name. How does he do it? I only have three boys but when they were growing up, I'd mix up their names. They are grown and married but sometimes I still mix up their names. Even though billions of sheep are in Jesus' flock, he knows each one of our names. He also knows our fears. He knows our needs. And like a good shepherd he will provide for those needs. You know he will because this Good Shepherd gave up his life to save you from your sins.

I remember when one of our boys was about five, he was being disobedient and so we sent him to his room. After a few minutes I went in to talk to him about what he had done. He admitted he felt bad for it and asked me, "Dad, why do we do wrong things?" I said, "Well, sometimes we listen to the voice that tells us to sin. We need to listen to God instead." And he said, "But God doesn't talk loud enough!"

You might feel that way too – so listen carefully to Jesus' voice because the devil shouts. Do you want to live life to the full? Then listen to Jesus your Good Shepherd. He's already proven his love for you.

Hear this: God's Word, the Bible, has already told you everything you need to know – so you need to know it. Read it every day! Pray over it.

Because listening to Jesus doesn't *just* mean hearing what he has to say, though, does it? The sheep who hears his shepherd's command to "Come!" but remains standing still isn't really listening is he? Those who listen...

2. Follow Him.

And so if you really want to live life to the full, it's not good enough to spend an hour here on Sunday morning listening to Jesus. You'll want to follow him the rest of the week with your actions and attitudes. Jesus put it this way:

"He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice...I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture" (John 10:3b, 4, 9).

Jesus' sheep follow him wherever he leads because they trust it will lead to green pastures. So when Jesus speaks to us about how to handle those who hate us, how we are to forgive them and pray for them, we will do this trusting it's the best thing to do. When Jesus calls us to turn away from the sinful pleasures of this world, we will do so trusting that life won't become dull because of it. When Jesus calls us to love people that we'd rather avoid or hate, we do it because he loves us so much.

Following Jesus doesn't always feel like it leads to green pastures, does it? I'm sure it didn't seem that way for Stephen in Acts 7. Stephen had listened to his Shepherd's voice and boldly proclaimed God's Word, but he received no thanks for it. Instead he was stoned to death. Had Stephen been misled? Not at all! When he was being pummeled with stones and just before he died, he said in Acts 7:56...

"Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (Acts 7:56)

What was the Good Shepherd doing moments before rocks thudded into Stephen and his blood soaked the Judean soil? Jesus was standing at the right hand of God – standing, not sitting – not impassively the way an earthly king might when he sees that one of his foot soldiers has taken an arrow to the heart. That kind of king would say, "What's another soldier?" Rulers fight using a war of attrition; they are willing to sacrifice the lives of their soldiers, hoping they throw enough bodies at the enemy that they'll finally give up. That's what Russia is doing to Ukraine and what Iran is doing to Israel. But that's not Jesus – every person matters to him! For example with Stephen, Jesus the Good Shepherd was *standing* out of concern for his sheep. He was standing ready to receive Stephen into the heavenly mansion he had died to build for him. The Good Shepherd is standing on guard for you too! Even when the doctor delivers the bombshell that you have cancer. Jesus isn't sprawled out on a couch in heaven mindlessly scrolling through socials while you've been frantically searching for a job for months. Jesus is standing. Jesus is watching. He's leading. So follow him and don't give up, even when the ground you're covering is rocky and hard to negotiate. Sometimes that's the only pathway to greener pastures. Listen to him and follow him!

When your life feels like an endless Hokey-Pokey dance, it's time to sit down and have a chat with your Good Shepherd. Listen to him and follow him. And remember that he has given you his own Spirit within you to guide you to discern Jesus' voice and to empower you to follow him. Talk to him prayer, listen to him speak to you. If you can spend a couple hours a day on FaceBook, you should be able to spend at least fifteen minutes in Faith-Book. Do you want to live life to the full? Then make

listening to and following Jesus your top priority. Whatever you need to cut back on our cut out of your life to make this happen, do it! If you don't, your life will continue to feel like the Hokey-Pokey. That isn't what Jesus wants for you. He beckons you to follow him and he promises to lead to green pastures where your cup will overflow with blessings even as it overflows now with forgiveness and his love. Amen.

Prayer

Benediction:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21, niv)