

Life to the Full

John 10:1-21

Key verse 10b, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

In today’s passage Jesus declares his divine identity in two I AMs: “I am the gate for the sheep” and “I am the good shepherd.” As the Gate and the Good Shepherd, Jesus came to lay down his life for the sheep. But why? He promises, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

What is this “life to the full?” Is the full life the one we see on Instagram, as people vacation and eat amazing food and marry the one of their dreams? And are you living this full life, or does it feel empty or confusing, one of drudgeries? Or is it full of romance? Excitement or adventure or powerful transformation? And how does one go about having this life to the full? Let’s bring these questions to Jesus and listen to him with great expectation. For today Jesus promises a life more abundant than your greatest imagination, from now to eternity.

I. Jesus, the Gate (1-11)

In John 9, we see the stark contrast between the Pharisees, so called shepherds of God’s flock, and Jesus the good shepherd. Jesus saw a man born blind and healed him. The religious leaders saw the man formerly blind and excommunicated him. Jesus looked for him until he found him and became his Messiah and Lord. The religious leaders did not care if he lived or died. Jesus was willing to die for him to protect him.

So in today’s passage, Jesus exposed the Pharisees for who they really were. Verse 1 Jesus starts with: “Very truly.” In Greek, it is “Amen Amen,” not just one Amen. What Jesus was going to say was so solemn, so certain and so important that it needed to be received with Amen amen.

Now, let’s read verses 1-5. **“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. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”**

The blind man did not recognize, listen, nor follow the Pharisees. Why? Jesus did not say explicitly. Instead he simply contrasted the true shepherd of the sheep with a thief/ robber/ stranger, and told them how the sheep responded to them differently.

If the religious leaders had reflected on what they had done to the formerly blind man, they could have come to the conclusion that they were thieves and robbers. If they had carefully reviewed what Jesus had done for the man, they could have inferred that Jesus was the very shepherd of the sheep. Did the Pharisees get Jesus’ point? Look at verse 6. **“Jesus used this**

figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.” Was the analogy hard for them to understand? While unfamiliar analogies to us, Jesus used culturally very familiar terms. As Bible scholars, who had read many stories in the OT related to shepherd and sheep, they should have understood it. But they did not understand what Jesus was trying to teach them. Why not? They were sure that they were the shepherds of the flock while Jesus was the thief and imposter in their pasture.

Jesus challenges everyone who reads this passage as well. If you say, “I am not a shepherd. Therefore this warning does not apply to me!” Then, fine! Then whose voice are you listening to? Whom are you following? Are you his sheep?” For those who see themselves as shepherds of the church, Jesus is asking-- are we listening and obeying me? Are we following him and his lifestyle? Do we approach the sheep pen by his way, through the Gate or by some other way, or teaching or intention? Do we know the sheep as Jesus does, and do the sheep know our voice as God’s appointed shepherd? May the Holy Spirit give us courage and sincerity to encounter Jesus and respond to him today!

When the Pharisees didn’t understand his words, what did Jesus do? Look at verse 7a. **“Therefore Jesus said again.”**

In order to understand Jesus’ explanation, we need some background on 2 things: a typical sheep pen and a shepherd’s daily life at that time. In the village, several shepherds (owners) had a sheep pen for common use. They built walls with stones, and then put many branches with thorns on top of the walls. Most importantly, they built a gate/door through which sheep could come in and go out. Each night they posted a gatekeeper. In the morning each shepherd, who was known by the gatekeeper, would come to the sheep pen, call them with his unique voice, and the sheep who knew their shepherd’s voice would follow him out of the sheep pen through the gate. Rather than pushing them from behind, he would go ahead of them, and they would simply follow him as he led them towards the pastures. In the open fields, each shepherd built a temporary sheep pen so that his flock could take rest after they grazed enough. One thing that was very remarkable about the temporary sheep pen was its gate. There was no gate. Instead, the shepherd himself laid across the entrance and became the gate. Anyone or anything that wanted to harm the sheep had to contend with him. Any sheep that went in or out of pasture had to go through him.

Now let’s read verses 7b-11. **“Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”** Through these we can learn mainly three things: (1) Jesus is the Gate for the sheep (2) Jesus is the gate for the shepherds (3) the sheep will come in and go out.

Firstly, Jesus as the gate for the sheep. In Jesus’ figure of speech, the gate is the opening, the entrance of the sheep pen. And this sheep pen is a place of home, the place of safety, rest, protection, healing and comfort-- in contrast to the dangers of the wide open fields. And the gate is the only entrance and exit of it.

Last Fall, I attended “March through the Arch” for the enthusiastic incoming NU freshmen. As these freshmen marched through the Northwestern Arch, it symbolized being a part of a new NU community, the gateway to higher education and a glorious future. By the way, I love UIC. Similarly, we have our own ideas of the gate or the way to our place of safety and protection and the good life. For some, it is education, or relationships or a good job. What is the gate you have tried to enter through hoping to have a good and successful life?

Now listen to Jesus in verse 7. **“Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.”** There are many gates in the world that seem to lead to many great destinations. However, Jesus declares that he is the only Gate for the sheep. What does he mean by that?

Since Adam and Eve sinned, all humanity was banished from the Garden of Eden. Since then, no regular Israelite could enter the holy of holies in the temple, and come before the presence of God. Only the high priest could come only once a year with animal’s blood. The entrance to God was blocked with a thick curtain. Now listen to Jesus again, “I am the gate for the sheep.” Do you remember what happened to the curtain when Jesus breathed his last on the cross? It was torn from top to bottom. Heb 11:20 states that Jesus’ broken body is a new and living way to the throne of God’s grace. 1Tm 2:5 says, **“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.”** So through Jesus, the gate, we can boldly and confidently come to the throne of God’s grace.

Who then can enter through the Gate? Jesus says that the Gate is for the sheep. No thief, no robber, and no wolf can go in it. So the question is, how do we know whether we are Jesus’ sheep or not? It is very simple. Do you hear Jesus’ voice? In all the voices and noises that surround us, can you discern which of these voices are from Jesus, and which are not? Do you take time intentionally each day to come to the Bible, which is his Word? And when you read the Bible, do you hear his voice speaking personally to you and then actually obey and follow his commands? If so, you are his sheep. If not, ask the Holy Spirit to open your ears to hear his voice and obey his voice, that you might enter into his presence and experience grace, protection, and power of the Almighty Father God as his beloved children of God.

Secondly, Jesus as the gate for the shepherds. Look at verse 8 again. **“All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them.”** If I paraphrase Jesus’ words, it can be “all who have claimed to be the gate for the sheep or tried to close or hide or distort the true gate, Jesus, are thieves and robbers.” In history, there have been countless counterfeit messiahs, religions, who have distorted the truth about who Jesus truly is. In John’s gospel, the Pharisees and teachers of the law stole the hearts of the people in the name of the Law of Moses. Worst of all, they branded Jesus as a demon-possessed sinner.

In our days, those are thieves and robbers who promise health and prosperity, worldly success, freedom and pleasure, and who put political, cultural and religious pressures upon God’s flock. We must not listen to these thieves and robbers, or enter through them.

The shepherds of God’s flock in his church need to hear Jesus’ warning as well. We human shepherds and leaders in his church should never go before Jesus. The shepherds of the

flock must enter the Gate Jesus first and be his sheep that listen to his voice as of foremost importance, caring for them with the mind and affection and humility of Christ.

Thirdly, the sheep can come in and go out through the gate. Look at verse 9b. **“They will come in and go out, and find pasture.”** Some misunderstand “coming in the Gate” as “being confined to the sheep pen.” Our fear is that we will live a boring life attending all kinds of meetings, suffering and stifled, missing out on all kinds of good opportunities in our lives. But Jesus promises that actually we will experience the true “going out.” Through Jesus the greatest life of true liberty and freedom and adventure awaits us.

Peter, in the Bible, was destined to live and die as an obscure fisherman in Galilee, who would never have traveled more than 10 miles from home. But when he obeyed Jesus’ call, “Come follow me, and I will make you a fisher of people,” who could have imagined where God would take him? After Pentecost he boldly preached the gospel and the new church exploded in Jerusalem; he preached the gospel to the first Gentile Christian convert, Cornelius, and church expanded to all the Gentiles. By the time of his death, he had become the shepherd for all the scattered Christians across the Roman world, and according to legend, died in Rome. Indeed, God built the rock of his church on Peter’s obedience to Jesus, his chief shepherd. We can also live a life of true liberty, adventure and freedom, unbound by fear when we follow Jesus. My in-laws are testimonies of God’s amazing leading, who brought them from the small countryside of S. Korea to America, and now to the harvest field of Rwanda. May we go out into the world with Jesus’ gospel according to his Great Commission, for he is always with us to the very end of the age (Mt 28:20).

II. Jesus as the Good shepherd

Let’s read verses 11-15. **“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.”** Here we can focus on three things about Jesus: (1) Jesus is the good shepherd. (2) He lays down my life for the sheep. (3) He knows his sheep.

Firstly, Jesus declares, “I am the good shepherd.” Throughout the Old Testament, Lord God himself is described as the Shepherd (Ps 23:1). **“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.”** The Israelite people were the sheep of his pasture (Ps 100:3). For a time, kings, prophets and priests were also considered shepherds of God’s flock. In Ezekiel 34, however, the Sovereign Lord rebuked the false shepherds of Israel for their greed, negligence and abuse of his sheep. So God fired them and promised two things. Firstly, He himself would be their Shepherd. Ez 34:11 and 16 state **“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘I myself will search for my sheep and look after them ... I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.’”** Secondly, God promised that he would send the Messiah from David’s descendants. Ez 34:23 states, **“I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he**

will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd.” The Shepherd prophesied by Prophet Ezekiel is both God and man, David’s descendant.

When Jesus declared, “I am the Good Shepherd,” it was a bold proclamation- “I am God who has come on earth as the Good Shepherd. I am the promised kingly messianic shepherd from David’s line. I am the God who cares for you and heals you”. “The good shepherd” doesn’t imply there might be better shepherds than Jesus. Rather, Jesus declares that he is the absolute good shepherd, God himself, who has neither sins nor flaws, but has all the matchless knowledge and wisdom, never-changing commitment and love for his sheep. He is the one who seeks after us relentlessly when we are lost and wander away and looks after all our needs. He binds up our injuries and brokenness, and strengthens us when we are weak, and shepherds with justice. May each of us come to trust in Jesus and confess, “The Lord my Good shepherd, in whom I lack nothing!”

Secondly, Jesus lays down his life for the sheep. A human shepherd in Jesus’ time laid himself down on his side and made himself the gate for his sheep. He put himself between any predator or robber and their own sheep. Only over his dead body could they have access to the sheep. A good shepherd like David fought with and killed lions and bears in order to rescue his sheep. David was not a hired hand. He didn’t work for a paycheck and he didn’t run away when the predators came. He risked his for his sheep.

Jesus is far superior to any human shepherd. He didn’t lay himself on his side on the ground like shepherds. Instead he laid himself on the cross, his hands stretched out and pierced, and his blood poured out, as a ransom for his sheep (Mk 10:45). He demonstrated his ultimate love for his sheep so that through his death we might live. Thank you Jesus for paying the ultimate price of your death for our salvation!

But he didn’t remain in the grave. He rose again from the dead conquering and destroying our enemies. So even now he is and forever will be Our Good Shepherd. He continually puts himself between all the evil ones and his sheep, fighting to protect us who belong to him.

Thirdly, Jesus knows his sheep and they know him. As my twins are identical many cannot tell them apart. But when I hear their voice, when I see how they walk even from the back, I can tell them apart. Likewise, they say that a shepherd in Lebanon can tell their sheep apart by touching them with his eyes closed. These examples are far inferior to Jesus’. Jesus knows his sheep just as the Father knows him and he himself knows the Father.

The thought that Jesus knows you this intimately and personally might scare you. In truth, it can comfort you greatly. Jesus knows when you sit and when you rise; Jesus perceives your thoughts from a far. Jesus hears your smallest sighs and pains, not to mention your sins and weaknesses. He also knows your strengths, your dreams and even hidden desires. He knows your needs before you know them. Even if he knows everything about you, he still calls you his sheep and lays down his life for you. What about you? How well do we know Jesus? How can we know him better?

Since I married my wife 23 years ago by faith and in love, my life has never been boring. Knowing her intimately and deeply as we share life together in its ups and downs has given me such a tremendous joy, and only a few times of troubles. Likewise, we can know Jesus more and more by entrusting our lives to him, committing to live with him. In truth, Jesus remains in his sheep through the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:23). I hope and pray that knowing Christ can be your and my passion like Apostle Paul (Php 3:10).

III. Life to the full

As we hear Jesus' divine identity as the Gate and the good Shepherd and that he lays down his life for the sheep, we wonder why he does so. Let's read verse 10 together. **"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."**

"To the full" is also translated as "more abundantly"(KJV) than any and every life you can imagine and have on earth. Life to the full that Jesus offers his sheep is much more abundant than the one Adam and Eve had had in Eden before they sinned. Even if life to the full is beyond our imagination, we can catch a glimpse of what it looks like and how we can have it from this passage.

"Life to the full" begins only when we acknowledge that Jesus is the shepherd and we are his sheep. Amen amen. So first I have to acknowledge that I am a sheep, helpless, dependent. And then I trust that he is my good shepherd who cares for me and loves me and knows what he is doing. I am not a roaring and powerful lion, independent and autonomous of God. When I entrust and depend and belong to my good shepherd, then "Life to the full" begins. He cradles me close to his heart. He gently touches us binding our wounds, restoring broken hearts. Jesus always provides everything we need physically, emotionally, spiritually and in every way. Jesus keeps us safe and secure from Satan and death.

And this "Life to the full" grows as Jesus calls us by name. He knows our deepest fears and desires and gifts. We are known by him and we come to know him more and more as we listen to his voice and follow him. We fall deeper in love with him as we trust that he knows even how many hairs I lost yesterday. So though we walk through the darkest valley, through the shadow of death, hearing his tender and loving voice we find deep comfort and experience life to the full.

"Life to the full" grows further as we walk with Jesus on earth living as shepherds for God's flock together. He leads us to his sheep, in places we would never expect. We experience the greatest joy of seeing his sheep come from death to life, and experience new life to the full. He takes us on adventures and brings to places and shows us miracles we would never had expected.

And finally, "Life to the full" will be consummated when we fully know Jesus just as the Father knows the Son and the Son knows the Father. When we are united with Jesus by faith, the fullness of God, when we have such an intimacy, oneness and communion with/in Jesus, we can have life to the full. We will be like him. Amen amen.

From this passage, we learned that there are only two kinds of people. The Pharisees and some of the Jews rejected Jesus' divine identity and became thieves, robbers or at best hired hands. When we reject Jesus the good shepherd, then we carry the burden of depending on ourselves. We have to live a hard life on earth outside of the sheep pen and in the end are eternally condemned. However, the sheep like the formerly blind man hear Jesus' voice, acknowledge and trust him as the Gate and the good Shepherd, come in and go out and have life, which is to the full. Which will you choose? May the Spirit of truth bless you and enable you to accept Jesus' divine identity as Your Gate and Your Good shepherd so that you can have life to the full and give glory to God.