We have seen a lot of examples of bad spiritual leadership in the news lately with child abuse, infidelity, extravagance at the expense of the parishioners. It seems to be getting more and more out of control. People are saying that there must be something wrong with their church. Their leaders have betrayed their trust. Their leaders have failed.

Then travel 3,000 miles to Israel - more examples of bad spiritual leadership. There is war going on in the streets. Two sides from different religions are at each other's throats. Children are being used as human bombs. There is something wrong with religions that promote that and there is something wrong with their spiritual leaders too.

Our world needs a good spiritual leader, someone who can shepherd you, someone who will not promote violence, but peace, someone who will not betray your trust. Our world needs a Good Shepherd. And the only spiritual leader who truly fits that description is Jesus Christ.

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday, the day that we remember that Jesus is our Good Shepherd. He is the spiritual leader that every church, that every Christian, that every person in the world needs.

In John 10, Jesus reminds us that not all people who claim to be spiritual leaders are safe to follow. Look at verse 1: I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. Jesus uses the picture of a sheep fold. Back then a sheep fold was a walled enclosure made of stones. Several flocks of sheep were kept in the sheep fold. When a legitimate shepherd came to get his flock, the watchman of the fold would let the shepherd enter. The man who does not enter the sheep fold by the gate - let's compare the gate to Jesus and his Word - if any spiritual leader tries to enter your life without talking about Jesus and his Word - but instead, tries to climb into your life by some other way - Jesus calls him a thief and a robber.

Jesus says more: The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. Anyone who comes to you and says: Let's talk about God, but let's not talk about Jesus - anyone who does that might seem good on the outside, but on the inside, they are from the devil and will only kill and destroy your soul.

Why are we attracted to these people? Maybe it is because we are attracted to anything that is new, anything that is different. Anything that is politically correct, anything that makes me feel good about my mistakes, anything that lines up with my sinful nature – we are attracted to those sorts of things. Our sinful nature does not want to hear about Jesus and his Word - and sometimes that causes us to welcome the thieves and robbers the devil sends into our lives - people who will kill and destroy our souls.

A perfect example of that is in the Middle East. The radical Muslim teenager who follows the voice of her shepherd commits suicide and goes to hell. Or what about in the USA? The faithful Christian suddenly becomes attracted to what appears to be another form of Christianity - they never talk about Jesus Christ, but boy, do they have a great speaker over there. The music is wonderful. The people are friendly! Sure, they never talk about Jesus, but they do talk about God. That's good enough, isn't it?
Jesus says: **No.** Anyone who tries to enter your life, not through the gate - which is Jesus and his Word - but through some other way, is a thief and a robber, and the result will be death for your soul.

We need to repent to God for those times we have strayed away from him, those times we have followed shepherds that do not focus on Jesus Christ. How good it is, that we can repent, and that Jesus, our Good Shepherd, forgives us.

Our Good Shepherd rescues us when we stray away. He finds the thieves and robbers who have captured us. He fights on our behalf and even died for us. But through it all, we have been set free from those thieves and robbers, forgiven of all of our sins.

Three days later, our Good Shepherd rose from the dead to prove to you that you are forgiven. What spiritual leader do you know who would allow himself to be blamed for the mistakes of others? What spiritual leader do you know who would allow himself to be executed in your place? What spiritual leader do you know who has not only died, but has risen from the dead? What spiritual leader do you know who offers the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, to all people, free of charge, no strings attached?

There is only one Good Shepherd in all the world, only one spiritual leader to follow, and that is Jesus Christ.

Jesus not only describes himself as a shepherd, he also describes himself as a gate. He says: **I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.** What does it mean that Jesus is the gate? There was once a man who was traveling in the Middle East and he came across a shepherd and his sheep. They began to talk and the shepherd showed him the fold into which the sheep were led at night. It consisted of four walls, with a way in. **This is where they go at night,** the shepherd said, **and when they are in there, they are perfectly safe.**

**But there is no door,** the traveler said. **I am the door,** the shepherd said. **When the light is gone and all the sheep are inside, I lie in that open space. No sheep ever goes out but across my body, and no wolf or thief comes in, unless he crosses my body. I am the door.** That is what Jesus is saying here. **I am the gate. I am the door. You are my sheep and I will guard you from those thieves. I will guard you from those wolves. Come into my sheep fold, my church, and be safe. In the morning, follow me, and I will lead you to the most beautiful pasture in the world.**

Do you know what that pasture is? What is it, that nourishes the flock of God? Where does Jesus lead you, where you will find strength for your soul? The pasture is his Word. It is the Lord's Supper. Jesus leads his sheep to the Word and Sacraments - the pasture of God - and there you learn that your sins are forgiven. There Jesus reminds you of all the things he wants you to know. There Jesus encourages us, tells you that he loves you, and prepares you for eternal life. Jesus is the door, and as you enter through him you will find eternal life. Whoever enters through him will be saved.

Once, when a friend was traveling in the Middle East, he got very sick and needed medicine. He went from one store to the next, but could not find what he needed. Some shady characters on the street offered him help, but he knew that they were just after his money because he was a tourist. Every door he walked through was a dead end. Every person that reached out to him was not trustworthy.

What a relief when he returned home. He could walk through the door, find a doctor, and receive the medicine that he needed. Isn't this how it is for everybody? The Bible teaches you that you are sick - spiritually sick with sin. You know this deep down inside.
And so you look for help, you look for a spiritual shepherd for your soul, someone that can help you. But there are so many shepherds out there, so many churches. Where can you go? Many of them do not have the medicine your soul needs. And you cannot trust everyone - Jesus tells you that right here. What shepherd can you trust?

What a relief it is to find THE Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. What a relief it is to find a flock where Jesus is the Shepherd, where Jesus is the gate. Here you can come and find medicine for your soul - the pure Word of God, no strings attached.

Remember what Psalm 23 promises us: To dwell in the house of the Lord forever. This morning Jesus comes to you through his Word and he says to you: I am the Good Shepherd. I am the gate. I have come that you may have life and have it to the full. Follow me and you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen!

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