

The Fourth Sunday of Easter  
May 3, 2020

“Freedom for the Flock (John 10:9)  
By Rev. Ed Weber

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior the risen Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,  
Our text for this Fourth Sunday in Easter is from our Gospel reading, John 10:9

**“I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.”**

Here ends our text.

I. The true freedom that belongs to the Jesus’ sheep

“Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave  
O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave?”

So, concludes the first verse of the four verses that Francis Scott Key penned for the song that we love to sing, especially before sporting events – the Star-Spangled Banner.

By the way, the first verse ends with a question mark, a rhetorical question. It is a question that expects a resounding yes! And that’s the way we sing it. Not with a doubt, but with a crescendo of pride! Yes, it still waves over the land of the free and the home of the brave! We sing with pride of the freedom that we enjoy and the bravery that bought that freedom by the many lives that were sacrificed. Most dearly, we Christians, treasure the freedom of religion! The right to peacefully gather to worship God – who is the Author of all freedom, from sin, death and the devil.

By the way, the next verse of the Star Spangled banner ends with the same words, but with an exclamation mark! Are we feeling that exclamation mark these days? Do you feel like your freedoms have been taken away from you these past months?

This shelter -in-place, stay-at-home order has been hard to stomach for the citizens of these United States who above all value their freedom. We've been ordered to not leave the house for a month...stop work unless yours is essential, or if you can do it from home, not go to church, or anywhere for that matter unless it's absolutely essential for living. We don't like this idea of hiding from something in our homes. We know it's been done with good intentions and for our well-being, but frankly, we're not feeling very free or brave these days!

Some citizens went to the capital building in Michigan this past week, voicing their displeasure, bearing arms, especially to demonstrate one of their freedoms. We want our freedom back! We want to go to work, go on vacation, go to a movie, go to the beach, go to wherever we want ...when we want!

Friends in Christ, this world's freedom, as good as it is in the United States, is really not as permanent as we thought it was. At this point were up to 25% free in this first phase. Is the Star Spangled Banner still waving? What will our freedoms look like for the rest of the year? How about next year?

How refreshing it is to hear in our Gospel reading the voice of the Good Shepherd. He says, truly I say to you. Truly... meaning there can be no doubts about what He's going to say. **"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."** They're truly free. They can go in and out as they please...without fear. There's no walking back any of their freedoms!

What is this pasture that the sheep are free to eat and are led by the Good Shepherd to eat? It is, of course, what the sheep need most, for their spiritual well-being, the Word of God, most importantly – the Gospel! Our Psalm for today is Psalm 23. And this Psalm speaks especially about how the Good Shepherd cares for His sheep by making them to lie down in green pastures; leading them beside the still waters. And by doing so, He restores their souls;

The green pastures are God's words of forgiveness and reconciliation for His sheep, who of themselves, are full of want, full of sin. They are full of the want of holiness and righteousness that is needed to be truly be not just Covid-19 free, but sin free! And in the very next verse of the Psalm, the Good Shepherd supplies this for their souls. **He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.**

The Good Shepherd leads the sheep in the only path, by the only name by which they can be saved...the name of Jesus. He is the Door, the only entrance through

which the sheep can go in and out in freedom and peace by the still waters. This freedom cannot be taken away or reduced. The sheep are never only 25% free of sin, or 50% free of sin. They are 100% free! Their heads are anointed with the oil of forgiveness and their cups runneth over. There is so much freedom from sin, death and the devil, that it cannot be contained!

Again, this is not just for a day, or a week, or until the Good Shepherd grows tired of His sheep. He never does and never will. **Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life;** There are no question marks about whether the Victorious Lamb of God's banner is still waving! It waves all the days of the sheep's lives and throughout eternity!

So, we often hear these verses at a Christian's funeral. The Lamb continues to shepherd them.

**“These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. 16 They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Revelation 7:14-17**

Yes, especially as the sheep go through the valley of the shadow of death, they will fear no evil. Why? Because the Shepherd is with them. “You are with me” the sheep say to the Shepherd. There is never a moment when there is doubt that freedom is lost, that heaven is removed or that the sheep are cast into the slavery of eternal suffering in hell. No! The Good Shepherd assures the sheep that He is present through His Word and Sacraments... rod and staff. Their freedom from sin, death and the devil cannot ever be taken away with the Lord at their side! The Good Shepherd sees to it that His sheep cross safely from this world of evil into His house...Heaven itself...the house of the Lord! Forever!!

## II. The Cost of this freedom

What was the cost for such a great freedom? For such a wonderful gift of eternal life? Ahh, the cost was great! The cost was more than the sheep could pay. The cost was the life of the Good Shepherd Himself. He had to defend His sheep from the ravenous wolf of the devil and lay down His life for them! The Good Shepherd had to become as His sheep and become the spotless Lamb of God that He might be sacrificed for all their sins on the altar of the cross!

And the Good Shepherd did so willingly...because... He loves His sheep. He loves you and He loves me. **Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for His friends. John 15:13** And that is what Jesus did for His sheep so that He might pay their debt. And He took up His life again so that they would live eternally with Him.

The land of the free is the land where sin is completely forgiven. Where there is no condemnation of death is the land that was bought with the brave blood of the Good Shepherd, Jesus! He faltered not, when His disciples ran. He did not come down from the cross to save Himself, when urged by everyone including the thieves next to Him. No, He bore the wrath of the Father, all of it...so that the sheep could live with free consciences, with free voices to talk with the Father, and with freed spirits to ascend to heaven at death. The Good Shepherd tore the veil for His sheep!!!

***There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. <sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup>For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup>that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.***  
(Romans 8:1-4)

What the law could not do, what the sheep could not do, what they were wanting, lacking, the righteous requirement of the Law...God did...by sending His own Son the likeness of sinful flesh...The cost was that Jesus was condemned in His flesh and He died.

### III. Living as freed in Christ

But Paul continues in verse 11.

**But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.**

Yes, the Good Shepherd was raised from the dead! And the same Spirit gives life to the sheep's mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

What a connection the sheep have with the Good Shepherd! The same Spirit dwells in them, assuring them that they have life. Jesus' sheep have life now in all its fullness!

**I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. John 10:10**

Though the freedoms which we enjoy as a nation have been curtailed, the spiritual freedom which Jesus' sheep enjoy has never diminished. Life with the Good Shepherd, Jesus, is abundant with Covid-19, or without it! Whatever state we are in, Paul says that he has learned to be content.

**I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11-13)**

The freedom that the sheep enjoy cannot be taken away by a virus or death itself. The sheep learn to live in all states in life, yes, do all things, through Christ who strengthens them!

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life...** What a powerful comforting statement that is for the Good Shepherd's sheep! There is never a moment in life without His goodness and mercy. It is no wonder that His sheep can do all things, and they can get through all things. For, the Good Shepherd strengthens them with His rod and staff, His Word and Sacraments.

Wherever the sheep are, sheltered-in-place, or not, they are living in the land of the free, Jesus' blood bought land, ...and home of the brave! Wherever you are...now and in the days to come...you are free! For the Good Shepherd has freed you once and for all with His all availing sacrifice on the cross! Jesus, the Brave, leads the way, that His sheep might follow Him bravely...all the way to their dwelling in the house of the Lord! Forever! Amen.

**"The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Amen. (Galatians 4:7)**