

Gospel Lesson**John 10:1-10****Sermon****"Shepherd and Gate"****A.J. Mealor**

There are so many things in this world that compete for our attention. There is a whole business department that is devoted to make products or ideas the top priority of our lives. It is called advertising and marketing. Their goal is to figure out the target audience of a product, and then do everything in their power to make you feel like you cannot live without the product. They want to form a relationship with you. They come up with catchy slogans to make you think differently about a product or business such as Sears' old slogan "Come see the softer side of Sears" that emphasized that they are more than just a hardware and appliance store. Marketers come up with TV and magazine ads that make you think that you have to have their product because it's the cool thing to do. Today, You can't even go to a movie or watch one of your favorite shows without products being used by characters to make you want them. In 24 Jack Bauer only uses Sony Erickson phones and only drives Fords. It doesn't matter if he is running away from someone down a suburban street and gets in a random car to get away, that random car is always a Ford. I guess even on the run he's thinking how much he loves the Fords drive, and how he cannot drive anything else. When Law and Order airs reruns on TNT little coke cans are superimposed on desks. These are the lengths advertisers and marketers have gone to sell to their target audiences, and I'm sure in the future they will continue to push the envelope.

I want to try something this morning. I'm going to say a few slogans and I want y'all to tell me the product.

Breakfast of Champions...Wheaties

Where's the beef?...Wendy's

Melts in your mouth, not in your hand...M&Ms

Can you hear me now...Verizon

I'm sure we could go on and name several different slogans and you would know the products. These companies have done an excellent job of forming a relationship with their customers and target audiences through their advertising, and it has made their slogans stick with us.

But are these the things that we really need in life though? Are these products really something that we absolutely need? Or are they just filling a void in our lives that can only be filled by something else. For the past couple of years what I have really been interested in has changed with the wind, with the exception of a one or two things. At one point I wanted to but the best golf clubs and practice everyday, and become really good at golf. I thought that I had to have the newest and best golf clubs to play well. But because these clubs were a little expensive, that phase didn't last to long. After that it was something else, after that it was something else. I was constantly rotating what I was interested in, attempting to fill a void in my life. Last year I came up with another great idea about what I needed to do. I was telling one of my friends about and he looked at me and asked me if I had prayed about it, I said

well no, it was just something that has been in the back of mind, and I have been thinking about it recently. He told me that over the past couple of years he had watched what I was interested in change on a whim, and he said do you know why that is? And I said well no. He said it was because I had been trying to fill a void in my life with material objects, when the only thing that could fill the void is Christ. He went on to say that I must have a good relationship with Christ, I must have my foundation in Christ, or I will continue to ride this merry go around of supposed needs, getting no where fast.

This is what our text is about this morning. It is about having a relationship with Jesus Christ, and that relationship being the foundation of our lives and everything that we do. There is saying that one of my preaching professors uses, "everything that we do is worship." Meaning everything that we do should be done to worship the Lord. In the passage Christ's followers are the sheep and Christ is their shepherd and their gate. The sheep do not follow the shepherd because it's the cool thing to do, or they want to do it. They follow the shepherd because when they follow him they know that they will be safe, that the shepherd will not lead them into harm's way. The sheep know the shepherd's voice and they follow him. The shepherd doesn't have to hit them over the head to get the sheep to follow him. He calls out to them, he calls them by name and they come running, He leads them out to the pasture. Thieves and bandits have gathered to attack the sheep, they are attempting to get into the sheepfold but they can't because they do not have a right relationship with the shepherd, and the sheep do not follow them because the thieves and bandits do not have a relationship with the sheep. Christ is the only person that can be our true shepherd and leads us down the right path. Only Christ.

To many times we do listen to the thieves and bandits who entice us with the latest gadgets or fashions, or whatever is the coolest or in thing to do. To often we succumb to their advances, and replace Christ with something else. The text says that the sheep did not listen to the thieves and bandits that came before Christ. For the group of believers that he is addressing this may be true. However, since that time I would say that at times the church has listened more to what the thieves and bandits are saying, than listening for Christ's voice. Since Christ died on the cross Christians have been led away from the sheepfold on countless occasions following curiosity, their own bad judgment, or who knows what. Christians have supported the slaughtering of nonbelievers across the globe in the supposed name of Christ. The Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades, the slave trade, all preformed under the banner of the cross. Throughout history Christians have often followed the crowd, the voices of the thieves and bandits lying in the weeds and forests waiting to strike.

We are no different from our ancestors. We are susceptible to the same influences that they experienced. The same factions gather waiting to strike, they attempt to climb over the wall to attach us, or lead us away from Christ. At times I have listened to their voices, as I said before I have struggled with this a lot. We have all listened to them, we have all succumb to the pressures. We are all of the flock, to God not one of us is better than the rest of us. The text doesn't talk about assistant shepherds or field hands. We are all of the flock if we have a right relationship with Christ. We are sinners, and try as we may we will continue

to sin. But just because we will sin, does not mean that we should give in so easily or think that we can continually give in, and everything will be fine.

The passage goes on to say that Christ is not the shepherd he is also the gate. He is the gate that the sheep must go through number one to get into the sheepfold, which has walls and keeps them safe, and number two the sheep must go through the gate to the pasture. Christ says that whoever enters by me will be saved. Whoever believes in Christ not only has a relationship with Christ, but also a relationship with God the Father, and it is through this relationship that we are saved. It is through Christ and Christ alone that we receive salvation. But the sheep are not the only ones in this story, and Christ did not come for only the sheep's salvation because Christ does not want to be in a relationship with just the sheep. Jesus wants to be in a relationship with everyone. Jesus seeks to be in a relationship with the thieves and the bandits; he wants to be in a relationship with the strangers who are reaching out to the sheep to harm them. John 3:16 says that God sent Christ, his only son, so that all who believe in hi may not perish but may have eternal life. Christ did not come for the few. He came for the many. Jesus wants to fill that void in our lives. He wants to walk with us, and lead us down life's paths.

Our Call to Worship this morning was adapted from the 23rd Psalm and a prayer in the Presbyterian Book of Common Worship. To close this morning I am going to read Psalm 23 in light of Christ. And while I read I want you to think of your life. How your life has been so far. Listen for the word of the Lord as it comes from the adapted 23rd Psalm. Christ is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me, a sheep in his flock, lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and staff – they comfort me. You prepare your table before me in the presence of the thieves and bandits; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely you came that I may have life, and have it abundantly. I shall dwell in the house of your father my whole life long.

In the waters of baptism our old life is gone and a new one has begun, one that is rooted in Jesus Christ. As we live out our lives let us remember to keep Jesus as the foundation of our lives, and let us worship the Lord in everything that we do. Amen.