

King of Glory Lutheran Church  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter: John 10: 10b-18  
No Need to be Sheepish – He Knows You  
Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

*What or who is stealing, killing or destroying the abundant life we have with God? Jesus the Shepherd knows us and loves us. As we focus on knowing God, the fears that drive us away will weaken.*

They weren't sheep, they were cattle. And the hired hand was not like the one Jesus talked about. For this man knew every single one of his cattle. He knew their personalities. They all looked the same to his friend visiting from the city. Except for the numbers tagged in their ears and differences in color or height, the friend couldn't see any differences.

The hired man said, "Now that one over there now she's an ornery one, she is. After she had her second calf, something just clicked off in her head. She about kicked me in the face the other day. And that scrawny little one over there, why he's been sickly all season. Been on three rounds of antibiotic's and I just can't figure what's going on. Even the vet doesn't get it."

They weren't sheep, they were cattle. But this hired man knew every single one of his head of cattle like he would know his own children. His friend from the city was amazed at the hired man's knowledge and actual fondness for each head in the herd.

"Why do you like them so much?", his friend asked.  
"Like them? I don't like them! I love these guys. They're my family. Plus they're God's creatures. Don't you think you could love them?"

His friend from the city sniffed the faintest whiff of manure, felt the chill coming through his coat, saw his buddy's sun leathered face and said, "Well, Chauncey, I think I'll leave the loving up to you!"

We're not sheep. We're not cattle. But Jesus says, "I know my own. And my own know me."

I know my own. Chauncey knew every last head in his cattle herd. He had too. The boss was counting on him to keep them healthy. Help the heifers give birth.

Keep the bulls from fighting with each other. As the hired man, he was responsible for each one.

Jesus isn't responsible for us. He just loves us. And he knows us as intimately as is possible. Parents sometimes wonder how one child could turn out so differently from an older or younger sibling. Same parents – completely different children. But those differences were enough to identify your kid in a crowd. You heard their voice. You saw their shadow. You recognized their laugh. That's your kid. You know them. And they know you.

That, brothers and sisters is what makes this abundant Easter resurrection life so amazing! Jesus knows us – down to each freckle and instinct. Each motivation and thought. Jesus knows us.

And because He knows us, He wants us to have that abundant life. The hired man has to protect the folk, the herd, so that nothing bad happens. Ever watchful for predators who come to steal, kill and destroy, the hired man guards against the unexpected.

Jesus tells us, the thief comes to steal, kill and destroy. Are we on the lookout for the thief? Who or what is the thief who comes to steal, kill or destroy our abundant life with the risen God? Who or what is the thief in your life and mine, who comes to steal, kill or destroy our abundant life with the risen God?

Because when we're constantly on the vigil keeping watch for all that snatches away life, fear is driving us. Fear keeps us on our toes. Fear keeps us staying up all night. Fear drives decision making. Fear alienates others who want to come close. Fear indeed snatches away life. It steals away happiness, trust, self-esteem and rest.

Terry Ahwal writes about the strength to fight fears in "This I Believe II: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women." Terry was 11 years old. One night after curfew, living under Israeli occupation, she took a chance to go see her grandmother who lived two blocks away. She heard soldiers coming towards her and hid underneath a truck. Her heart was pounding so very loud, she was certain that at any moment she'd cry out and the men would shoot her. She watched their boots go back and forth in front of the truck.

Remembering her mother's advice, to put aside fear and anger in order to pray for the soldiers, who were very likely to be afraid themselves, Terry began to do just that.

She listened to their voices. They reminded her of her neighbors. She wondered what they ate and where they slept? 'Were they afraid of little children like me? Do they have big or small families?' Terry believes this process actually calmed her down enough to save her life. ("This I Believe II: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women." Editors J. Allison and D. Gediman. Holt Paperbacks. Henry Holt and Company, LLC. New York. 2008)

When Terry began to reflect upon each soldier as a person, rather than a man with a gun who could kill her, she discovered a process

The thieves are there – aren't they? In our lives, the thieves are standing at the ready to take away the joy and peace we can have living in Jesus' flock. In our families, the fear of what action another member will take. The fear of losing a relationship.

What about the joy that gets stolen when a job is lost? When our benefits aren't sufficient to cover the expenses? We worry about our communities when kids are out on the streets looking for housing. In larger urban areas gangs do use violence and guns to keep turf. Adults' communication breaks down from dialog to slander and gossip. The thief comes in to steal, kill or destroy. Nations distance themselves from one another. Lies are easier than truths.

What gets stolen when all of those things happen, is more than just money or a relationship. What gets stolen is the erosion of all that is foundational to an abundant life – not only with one another, but with our God as well.

We lose integrity. Self-esteem. Identity. Confidence. Joy. Drive. Determination. Passions. Connectedness. Support. Encouragement. All this and much more is lost when fear drives our decision making because the thief is hiding just around the corner.

What is it for you? For myself? We're four weeks into the season of Easter. The tomb is still open. Christ is still risen. And yet, perhaps four weeks distant from that glorious morning, we've may have forgotten that power. In the time that's elapsed we may be overlooking or have put out of our minds, the fact that even as

Jesus knew each sheep head and personality and ornery traits, He still chose to die.  
He still chose to rise!

Jesus chose to die and rise for we. We're not sheep, we're not cattle. But we are Jesus' beloved flock, every single one of us. He knows our fears. He knows our story, he knows us by name.

So it's time friends. It's time once again to trust in this better than hired man, better than shepherd. It's time to trust again in God, the Savior who dies and rises for each of us, all of us, and all of humanity.