

A LONGER LOOK AT THE LESSONS

Study Guide and Leader Guide

for Pericopes as Listed in *Lutheran Service Book*

Series A

Lent 1–Easter 7

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Lesson 10

Fourth Sunday of Easter

The Holy Gospel: John 10:1–10

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is always Good Shepherd Sunday. In the Three-Year Lectionary, the Holy Gospels lead us through the chapter and its metaphors in three selections. These first verses of the Good Shepherd chapter relate to what preceded. Jesus gave sight to a man born blind and identified Himself to him as the Son of Man. As the man, with new sight and new insight, knelt and worshiped Him, Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” Some Pharisees asked, “Are we also blind?” Jesus told them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains” (9:39–41).

Speaking of the Lord as Israel’s Shepherd and of their religious leaders as shepherds was a familiar metaphor of the Old Testament (see Psalm 78:52; Jeremiah 23:1–4). When you keep the interaction with the Pharisees in mind, you readily understand the point of Jesus’ “he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way.” In their willful blindness, the religious leaders were deceiving themselves. As false shepherds, they were harming God’s flock.

158. In Jesus’ figure of speech, what is the key factor that distinguishes the shepherd from the thief? How is the true shepherd’s identity verified in his interaction with the sheep in the pen?

159. Why did the Pharisees not understand this seemingly obvious figure of speech?

In this section, Jesus did not refer to Himself as the ____ but as the ____.

160. As He referred to Himself as the door of the sheep, what was Jesus boldly saying had to happen if the people and their leaders were to be saved and come in and go out and find pasture?

Jesus’ “I am the door” is another of His emphatic “I am”—*egō eimi*—statements that are keys to appreciating John’s Gospel. Jesus’ saying “all who came before Me are thieves and robbers” is a general statement that Jesus made for impact. It was true only by comparison with God’s own Shepherd in the case of those who were faithful shepherds. Old Testament history records the service of many faithful judges and prophets and priests, but all fell short of the ideal Shepherd.

161. How was the religious establishment of Jesus’ day guilty of being “thieves and robbers”?

Verse 10 leads toward Jesus' picture of Himself as the Good Shepherd. In it, Jesus contrasted Himself and His reason for coming with the motivation of thieving false shepherds. The tense of the Greek verbs is significant. "The thief comes" is present tense, showing continuing action—he "keeps on coming" and is a constant danger because he comes to steal and kill and destroy. In contrast, Jesus said, "I came" (the emphatic *egō*)—a decisive coming that does not have to be repeated (see Hebrews 9:24–28). The lasting result: "They may have life"—a present tense with the thrust of "they may keep on having."

162. For what reason(s) might believers imagine they do not have the Shepherd's gift of life and the abundance of its accompanying blessings?

The First Lesson: Acts 2:42–47

It is significant that a description of the continuing fellowship of believers follows immediately after the account of their conversions and Baptisms. It would be hard to think of them experiencing this dramatic turnaround and just going back to life as usual. Relating to Jesus Christ, the Head, in faith always calls people to relate to one another in love in the fellowship of the Body of Christ. About the first Christians, we're told, "They devoted themselves to ___ and ___, to ___ and ___."

163. What encouragement is there in each of these for our Easter faith and life?

These first Christians immediately displayed their love of Christ in their love and concern for one another. Luke's account gives you a feeling of a "camp" or "retreat" experience, which could not have continued indefinitely. But their enthusiastic love and joy gave them favor with all and attracted others into their fellowship. Church-growth studies often refer to this quality as "the love quotient."

164. How would you rate our congregation's love quotient? What can we do to improve our practice of Christian love?

165. How does this First Lesson relate to the theme of today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Peter 2:19–25

Peter wrote: "This is a gracious thing, when, ___, one ___ while ___." This surely related to what some Christian slaves were experiencing at the hand of their pagan masters. We, too, may be in situations in which we "do good and suffer for it."

166. What was the "secret" of Jesus' being able to suffer unjustly without retaliating, and how can we follow His example? (See Romans 12:17–21.)

As our substitute, Jesus “bore our sins in His body on the tree.” Because of His atonement, we are forgiven—declared to be righteous—assured of eternal life. But here Peter was pointing beyond justification by faith in Christ to its effect on daily living as Christians.

167. Identify the three phrases by which Peter pointed to the life-renewing results of Jesus’ suffering for us. State how each encourages us to be conscientious in our discipleship.

Lesson 10

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Almighty God, merciful Father, since You have wakened from death the Shepherd of Your sheep, grant us Your Holy Spirit that when we hear the voice of our Shepherd we may know Him who calls us each by name and follow where He leads; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: John 10:1–10

It is important that you and your group understand that this first section of John 10 does not talk about the Good Shepherd but about shepherds, religious leaders, and the way they approach and lead people.

158. The key factor that distinguishes the shepherd from the thief is the ways they get to the sheep. The shepherd enters through the door opened by a watchman who recognizes him; the thief does not want to be seen by the watchman, so he climbs into the sheep pen some other way. The shepherd knows his sheep and calls them by name, and his sheep know his voice and are ready to follow him. Jesus was talking about true sheep in God's flock, who listen only to the true shepherd—an example of a true sheep is the man born blind, who would not be dissuaded by the Council about Jesus being God's prophet. There are many who do the opposite, do not listen to the shepherd's voice, and run eagerly after the voices of false, misleading "shepherds."

159. The Pharisees did not understand for the same reason they were not convinced by Jesus' miracles: they simply did not want to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Fill-in Answers: In this section, Jesus did not refer to Himself as the Shepherd but as the door of the sheep.

160. For the people and their leaders to be saved and find pasture, they had to go in and out through the door, that is, through Jesus, accepting Him as God's promised Savior and Lord.

Help your group understand the emphasis of the *egō eimi* statements. All by itself, the verb *eimi* means "I am," Adding the pronoun *egō*, "I," gives it emphasis—something like "I, I only, am."

161. The religious establishment had hardened the rites and rituals of the covenant of grace into a legalistic system that robbed Judaism of its true spirit. This brought the people under their control, but it reduced the covenant faith to a legalistic "doing religion." The chief priests profited from temple concessions, selling animals for sacrifices and changing secular money into temple coin. They were more interested in fleecing the flock than in shepherding it.

162. Through trust and faith in Jesus as the world's Savior, be it ever so small and frail, believers have His gift of life—and they have it abundantly (see also John 3:36). Having eternal life, we also have forgiveness of sins, salvation, membership in God's Church, the fruits of the Spirit, and all the other gifts God gives His children. It is true that our old nature manages sometimes to draw our attention to the weakness and inconstancy of our faith, to the insufficiency of our own spiritual goodness and merit, and to our frequent failures to live as His disciples. Then we begin to imagine we do not have the Shepherd's gift of life with all of its accompanying blessings. Doubts arise about our salvation. We feel obliged to earn our way back to God and the life He gives. Faith knows better. Faith leads us to walk conscientiously in His ways

and serve in His name (see Luke 9:23–25). Our assimilating and appreciating what faith in Jesus means to us grows as God deepens our understanding of His Word in the power of the Spirit.

The First Lesson: Acts 2:42–47

Fill-in Answers: About the first Christians, we're told, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers."

163. "The apostles' teaching" provided the new Christians an objective basis in the written Scriptures for their subjective Pentecost experience. "Fellowship" is what we share in common, our faith and love that are passed back and forth between us and from God. "Breaking of bread" was simply eating together, but soon became the language of the Church to refer to Holy Communion, celebrated at the end of fellowship meals. The Greek says "the prayers." The first Christians continued in the rituals of the temple—with fuller meaning—as well as in their own praying together. They encourage us to make "the prayers" a togetherness activity also in today's Church.

The Lord manifested His presence through wonders and signs done by the apostles, and the Christians were led spontaneously to respond to the needy among them by selling their possessions and pooling their resources. This "camp" setting could not continue indefinitely, because eventually all of them would be reduced to poverty. Their joy and love were attractive and contagious, but they had to get back to the mundane concerns of making a living. So, as the Church organized itself, the oversight of the care of the needy was made the responsibility of some, and their efforts were supported by the congregation's offering of firstfruits of their income.

164. Some Lutheran congregations rate rather low in "love quotient." Generally speaking, our tradition has encouraged an intellectual faith, and our worship and communing have been seen as interaction between individuals and God, without much horizontal emphasis. Getting to know others personally in settings that encourage the development of openness and the sharing of concerns and needs may lead to a higher love quotient. The small-group emphasis in today's congregations is an attempt to meet this need. Living as we do in an insulated society, we need to work at it.

165. This first lesson emphasizes the importance in a Christian congregation of congregating, of gathering around the teaching of the Word, of the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and of the togetherness activity of the prayers. Jesus, the Door, is the key to all of this as the members of His flock follow Him and "go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:9).

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Peter 2:19–25

Fill-in Answers: Peter wrote: "This is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly."

These were words spoken primarily to Christian slaves (see v. 18) and applied directly to their situation. Pagan masters were often cruel in their treatment of slaves and unreasonable in their expectations of them. Living under God's grace and favor would help Christian slaves perform their duties willingly even when their masters were harsh and unappreciative. A concern for the Christian way would strengthen them to say no to degrading demands, even though it would mean unjust punishment. We might find ourselves working for harsh, unappreciative bosses and be asked to involve ourselves in dishonesty and cheating. It is hard to work in such a setting, but, unlike slaves, we have the alternative of leaving to work elsewhere. But it is hard to stand up for what is morally right in a compromising situation when our financial security is threatened as a result.

166. Jesus' "secret" was that He "continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly." God's mill may grind slowly at times, but it does grind, and it "grinds exceedingly fine." We, too, may learn to focus our attention on God's will for us and leave matters up to Him, letting Him take vengeance if He wants to. When we apply Jesus' secret and aim at repaying evil with good, we will surprise our antagonists and find suffering more endurable.

167. These are the three phrases:

(1) "That we might die to sin and live to righteousness"—a theme that runs again and again through the New Testament, for example: "Put off the sinful nature and put on the new nature in Christ," "We were

buried with Christ so that we might rise with Him to walk in newness of life,” “Those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its sinful desires,” and “Whoever claims to live in Jesus must walk as Jesus did.”

(2) “By His wounds you have been healed”—another repeated New Testament emphasis. The root meaning of *salvation* has to do with “healing.” We are healed by Jesus’ suffering so we no longer live just for ourselves but for Him who for our sakes died and was raised.

(3) “But have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls”—this also recurs again and again in Holy Scripture. What better encouragement for us to pursue a new direction in our daily lives than to know that we are sheep in the Shepherd’s flock? We can follow Him happily, knowing that He will never mislead us but will take us to eternal life with Him.