#### **Protecting children and encouraging survivors**

Sermon based on John 10

**John 10:7-18**

**7Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. 9I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.**

**11“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.**

**14“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—15just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. 17The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. 18No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”**

Did you know that April is child abuse prevention month? For those of us who don’t know much about child abuse, there was an eye-opening study conducted in the mid-1990s that presented the findings on something called ACE research. ACE stands for adverse childhood experiences. This study found that 20% of the population, even in the most affluent areas, has been sexually abused. According to the statistics, one out of four women here have been sexually abused. And one out of six men here have been abused.

The ACE study found that if you had an adverse childhood experience like sexual abuse, you are much more likely to be involved in risky behavior, and even sinful behavior, like being promiscuous or addicted to drugs and alcohol. Also, you are much more likely to have other health issues like asthma, lung cancer, heart disease, bipolar disorder. Now, why is that? Because God gave us a fight or flight response in dangerous situations. It’s a blessing to have an adrenaline rush if a bear is chasing you. But, as one doctor said, it’s not good if the bear shows up in your bedroom night after night.

Another difficult part of this issue is the spiritual side of abuse. Very often the perpetrator will use Scripture to justify the abuse. They will say the Lord’s Prayer before the abuse or even say that God allows what is happening, so he must approve it, which as you can imagine leaves the victim feeling spiritually confused at best, but most often angry with God.

So this a big problem. And it has affected and touched the lives of everyone here at some level, whether you know it or not. And many of you have been suffering for years in silence, and you have never told anyone. So we have to talk about this. Here is the question that I want to answer today: **How can we help those who are survivors of abuse?**

To answer that question, we are going to turn to John chapter 10. This chapter is called “The Good Shepherd Chapter.” But it doesn’t stand alone. We have to know what happened just before this section to understand it. In John chapter 9, Jesus just healed a blind man. It was a great miracle! But Jesus healed on the Sabbath, the day the Jews were not supposed to work. So the religious leaders who twisted God’s law wanted to condemn Jesus. They even kicked the man who was blind out of the synagogue for believing in Jesus.

So, because of this event, various groups started forming. There were pro-Jesus groups, and anti-Jesus groups, and people who didn’t know what to think who were in the squishy center.

So Jesus preaches this message as a way of describing all these different groups, highlighting what made him different.

Jesus begins. **Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:7-10).**

First of all, Jesus says, “I am the gate.” We need to understand what the audience was visualizing. This is what a common sheep pen would look like in Jesus’ day. There was a wall made with stone, and one gate where the sheep could enter and leave.

Jesus was saying, “If you want to be part of my flock, you need to enter through me. You can’t enter on your own. Come and trust in me. Repent of your sin and trust in my grace.”

So, Jesus is the gate. But Jesus also mentions another group. They are the thieves and robbers. Earlier in John 10, Jesus says that the thief climbs over the wall to attack the sheep. The thief has one goal: to steal and kill and destroy. He wants to take the sheep. He wants to harm the sheep.

There is also another group. There are the wicked people who want to harm God’s people.

And if the statistics are only half right, many of you have experienced this. You have had religious people who have climbed into your life only to harm and destroy. They were not really followers of Jesus. They didn’t come through the gate of faith. They came only to harm and destroy.

What can be so hard, though, is distinguishing between the truth of Jesus and the lies of the thieves. As I mentioned, very often perpetrators or anyone who wants to harm people will use Scripture in a distorted way. And you might be confused on whether or not those thieves and robbers and perpetrators were speaking for Jesus.

Well, Jesus helps us make the distinction. Thieves and robbers and perpetrators, they come to steal, kill, and destroy. They come to take. But Jesus came to give life to the full. So, if someone was taking away from you and hurting you, they are not from Jesus.

But Jesus is different. He came that you might have life and have it in abundance. What is an abundant life? A life that is secure and safe. A life where you are accepted and treated with dignity. That is what Jesus came to give you. When he offered his life for you, you became an accepted, loved child of God, so that you could have life and have it in abundance.

So far, Jesus has defined two groups for us. Thieves or perpetrators, wicked takers. And then on the other side, Jesus, the one who gives and gives in abundance.

Now Jesus changes the metaphor. He says, **11“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep” (John 10:11-13).**

Jesus is not only the gate to enter the sheep pen, he is the Good Shepherd. Jesus mentions another group: the hired hand. The hired hand is different from the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, but when the wolf comes, the hired hand doesn’t care for the sheep. He gets scared and runs away. The wolf then attacks the flock.

How does this apply to the area of child abuse? First of all, who is the wolf? The devil. I believe the devil is ultimately behind any kind of abuse. I believe this is the devil’s favorite sin. According to the research, if the devil can lead someone to abuse someone else, he might just have them for life. He might make them feel ashamed for the rest of their life or confused and angry with God.

When Jesus talks about the hired hand, I believe he is talking about the religious people and religious leaders who run from their responsibilities. Unfortunately, the church has a long history of silencing the victims and protecting the perpetrators. They might hear of an abuse or see something, but they try to deal with the problem in-house. They run because they care nothing for the sheep, which just re-traumatizes the victim.

And again, according to the statistics, many of you have had this experience. You were silenced when you cried out for help.

But then there is Jesus, the Good Shepherd. The wolf, the devil, and all his lies come to destroy humans by using sin and death to drag them away to hell, where the devil also will suffer. But Jesus sees the threat, and he doesn’t run. Jesus walks right into Jerusalem and lays down his life on the cross. And he lets sin, death, and hell attack him and take his life, so that all who repent of sin and trust in Jesus will be saved.

Let me just give a quick recap of all the different groups that Jesus talked about. There are thieves and robbers who are influenced by the wolf, the devil, who come to kill and destroy. There are hired hands who run when it gets hard and don’t defend the sheep from evil. Then there is Jesus, who gives up his life to destroy the work of the devil and all that is evil.

And now for the ultimate hope. **14“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—15just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. 17The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. 18No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father” (John 10:14-18).**

If you are a survivor of abuse, how can you begin to pick up the pieces? First, get to know the Good Shepherd. He knows you. He knows all your pain and sadness. He knows your shame and struggle. He knows you. Now it’s time for you to get to know him. He is the one who lays down his life to rescue you. He can use you to reach out to other survivors. There are so many lost sheep in our community—those who have suffered and are looking for hope. Jesus wants all of them to listen to his voice, so that we might all be one flock and under one shepherd.

Finally, Jesus talks about his death and resurrection. So many people here feel dirty and ashamed, for the things that have been done to them and the things that they have done in their life to cope with their pain. Jesus takes all of that in his own body and dies. But then he is raised to life in a body. And the Bible says over and over again that because Jesus rose in the body, we will be raised in a body. When Jesus returns, you will get a new body—a body that won’t be harmed or hurt by others. A body that is completely free of fear and shame and sadness.

So today I want to call upon God’s people to use their strength and authority to protect boys and girls and women and men. You might need to make a call today, to turn in someone you know. Maybe even yourself. And life is going to get harder before it gets better. Let’s use our strength to protect children. That is why God gave us strength. Let’s follow the example of Jesus the Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for others.