

“Called by Name”

John 10:1-10

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It's the plague of nearly every parent who has multiple children and sometimes even pets. You need a very particular child for a very particular thing, and so you yell out for them and the wrong name starts to leave your lips. As you realize your mistake, you end up with a cascading roll call that finally lands on the one you intended to call in the first place. And then you end up with clever nicknames for your kids based on those moments of inane babble, like Charlily for example. You can't help it. You certainly know who your children are, but in the chaos and buzz in your life, it's hard to keep your thoughts straight and organized, especially when you are juggling your God-given vocations.

But the Lord doesn't need a roll call of names in order to land on His call for you. As you witnessed this morning, you were called by name in the water of your Baptism. This morning He called John, Ruth, Lily, and Peter into His sheepfold, and He will never leave you or forsake you, and because of His care as your Good Shepherd, you have the promise of eternal life in His holy presence. According to His divine mercy, you have been called to Him and you follow His voice. Strangers abound throughout the world, seeking to pull you away from the voice of your Savior by mimicking it and urging you to follow them instead. The Old Adam within you hears their call, but the new man that emerges from the blessed waters of Holy Baptism hears only Christ.

At the bidding of the evil one, many will seek to lead you astray, and your sinful flesh is all too willing to follow the voice of those strangers. In our text this morning, the thieves and robbers that Jesus speaks of are the Pharisees, who seek to enter the sheepfold by any way except the door in order to lead His sheep away. But the thing about sheep is that they know their shepherd, and will not only not listen to a strange voice, but will flee from it. You are the sheep of the Good Shepherd, and His voice is the one you hear calling you out of the darkness of sin. Yet, you have no power of your own will to follow His voice. As those who must still battle the Old Adam and face the trials and temptations of the devil, you are still subject to sin's oppression, and it is a guarantee that you will fail in defeating it.

You cannot defeat sin, death, and the devil. You're just a wandering sheep, prone to following any voice that would call you and give you any attention. You are powerless to do anything on your own, and will constantly fail to please God by what you say and

do in your life. No matter how hard you try, you will still need someone else to save you. You will always need a Savior to pull you out of the depths of your depravity, because your sinful flesh wants you wallowing in it instead of escaping it. And there are all kinds of strange voices that will try to convince you otherwise. False teachers that convince you that you just have to try harder, and you can reach a level of holiness that allows you not to sin anymore have not entered through the door, but have climbed the walls in order to steal you away from your Shepherd and the truth of His salvation.

Because the only thing these thieves can do is kill and destroy. All they can do is lead you down a path of destruction that ends in an abandonment of the true faith, leaving you with only condemnation and darkness for eternity. You would be like sheep that have gone astray, lost in sin and darkness with no saving faith. To have trust in yourself for your own salvation is to have nothing and to offer yourself up as an easy meal for the wolves of this world. Do not fall victim to the lies and deceit of the devil, for he uses these thieves and robbers to do his will of pulling you away from the Shepherd who has called you by name. He has called you personally to be among His sheep—to be among those who can and will strengthen you as you daily battle the attacks of those who seek your destruction.

The Lord gave you other sheep, your brothers and sisters in Christ, to support you as you all walk in this world of sin. And as the Acts of the Apostles records in our first reading, this happens in the devoting of yourselves “to the Apostle’s teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42).” You are not aimlessly meandering through life as a child of God. You have purpose and you have been given a means of exercising that purpose. Surrounding yourself with the fellowship of the saints is the way God intended His people to dwell in this life. “All who believed were together...praising God,” as He daily added to their number—daily adding to the number of His sheepfold as their Shepherd. In gathering them together in His name, He is safeguarding them against those who seek to steal them away, and this He does for you in gathering you to His Church around the blessings of Word and Sacraments.

And even this He doesn’t just leave to chance. He doesn’t just give His gifts and cross His fingers hoping that His people will follow His commands. He has given His people the gift of the holy ministry. Through the mediated call of the Church, He has called undershepherds by name to serve in the stead of Christ as He prepares a place for you. The voice of your Pastor is the voice of Christ as He preaches the Word in truth and purity, imparting to you the forgiveness of sins won by Your Lord and Savior upon the cross. He speaks the words of absolution so that your sin-troubled conscience would be assuaged by Jesus’ work of mercy. When he pours water on the head of a small child or

an adult alike, he is speaking the words commanded by His Lord in Matthew 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” In service to the Good Shepherd, he obeys that command and cares for the Lord’s flock as you are gathered and God adds to your number daily those who are being saved.

“In the stead and by the command” of the Lord, Jesus Christ, His undershepherd forgives, renews, and strengthens the flock of the Shepherd in the right administration of His Holy Sacraments, and in the proper preaching of Law and Gospel. There in those means of grace, you find comfort and peace in this life, even in the face of robbers and thieves that seek your downfall. Come often to His divine service, where the words of forgiveness are proclaimed in the Pastor’s absolution by the authority of Christ, as you are reminded of your baptism which has made you clean in the waters of regeneration. Be present to receive His Holy Supper, the Sacrament of the Altar, distributed to you according to Christ’s divine institution, receiving His very body and blood which is truly present here.

Despite the fears and anxieties of this life, and despite the sin which pervades throughout the world, He still gathers and calls His sheep unto Himself. In a very real and profound way, He gives Himself to us in Word and Sacraments as the means of His salvation. Those means are the shepherd’s crook with which He defends and saves His people, and He has extended the power of that crook to His called servants that care for His sheep in His stead. By water and the Word, as you have just seen with your own eyes, He drowns the Old Adam as you are made new by His grace. In the hearing of His word preached in its truth and purity, you hear that you are forgiven of all of your sins for His sake alone. And in the body and blood which He shed and gave for you upon the cross of Calvary, you are assured that death is not the end.

As one who has been baptized into the death and resurrection of your Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, you are led beside the still waters and will find nothing but green pastures on which to feed. He has called you out of the darkness of this world in the water of your Baptism, and by His Holy Spirit, He guides you all your days until the day He calls you to Himself in the heavenly dwelling of His Father. Life in Him is yours, and it is a life that is given to you abundantly for Jesus’ sake alone. By faith in Him you have the hope and promise of everlasting life, one which will never fade, because He will guard and protect you. You know His voice because you are His sheep, and no one will snatch you out of His hand. He has called you by name, and you have the assurance that you will dwell in the light of His glory forever, side by side with Your Good Shepherd in everlasting joy forevermore. Amen.