

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
September 14 & 15, 2013  
John Crosby  
REVIVE: Abundant Living  
John 10:10, Philippians 3**

In the last seven minutes, we have just seen two views of the indelible imprint that Jesus of Nazareth left on our world. One is old and describes the music and one is as new as tomorrow but both focus on this one individual and the mark He left on our world and possibly on us all. Young Steph Spencer is going to speak this evening at The Table and when she mentioned this video, I said, "No, I really don't have enough time to view it." But then I saw it and, of course, was stunned. What I love especially is the way it ends when it says, "But He was a man. Or was He something more?" We want to take these three weeks to start our autumn by asking, if He was something more, what does that mean to us?

I started to follow Jesus as I began college. Somebody had given me a Bible to read and, frankly, I couldn't get through the thee's and the thou's and the begat's. The King James Bible was impenetrable to me. Then somebody took pity on me and gave me a newer translation of the Bible called The Living Bible and suggested it would help if I would try to memorize some of it, which made sense. There was this one sentence I came across that just killed me. It was in the Letter that the apostle Paul had written to the church in Philippi. It was the very first thing I ever memorized, I think.

<sup>11</sup> So whatever it takes, I will be one who lives in the fresh newness of life of those who are alive from the dead [Philippians 3:11].

I read the Bible more and more and came across Jesus' story in the Book of John that Laura read to the kids today. It said that Jesus claims,

<sup>10</sup> . . . . I have come that they may have Life, and may have it in abundance [John10:10].

In all of its fullness. Or as Eugene Peterson translated,

<sup>10</sup> I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.

That's where we started last week. In the story that John tells, Jesus is walking along and comes across a man born blind, just like so many of us are blind in different ways. Jesus has an encounter with him that leaves the man seeing, the crowd buzzing, and the Pharisees not just skeptical but frustrated. What happens next? Well, Jesus talks to the man born blind and then turns to the Pharisees and says, "You don't understand? This is what it's about." In John 10, Jesus says, "I tell you Pharisees the truth,

10 . . . anyone who doesn't enter the sheep pen by the door but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber.

Okay, so He's telling some kind of story. I'm supposed to try to understand the story.

<sup>2</sup> The one who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> The doorkeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought all his own outside, he goes ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they recognize his voice. <sup>5</sup> They will never follow a stranger; instead they will run away from him, because they don't recognize the voice of strangers." <sup>6</sup> Jesus gave them this illustration, but they did not understand what He was telling them. <sup>7</sup> So Jesus said again,

"Understand this."

"I assure you: I am the door of the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who came before Me are thieves and robbers,

At this point the Pharisees are not feeling very good.

<sup>8</sup> All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn't listen to them.

Remember the end of the Sermon on the Mount. It says, "the crowds were amazed" because Jesus spoke as no one had ever spoken to them before, as one who had authority.

<sup>9</sup> I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> A thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance. <sup>11</sup> "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

<sup>14</sup> "I am the good shepherd. I know My own sheep, and they know Me . . . .

It says the Pharisees still did not understand, and they probably were not alone. There are many days when I struggle to understand. I am confused at this idea that He comes and we might experience life differently, *in abundance*, because I think of life the way Laura expressed it with these three doors. Most of the time, most of the week, most people live at the normal door. They go to school. They go to work. They go home. Life is normal. But then some try Door No. 2. They become religious people and religious people make a deal with God. They say, "God, if I obey, if I learn the right words, if I say the right things, then life gets better, right?" That's Door No. 2. That's the religious life. But Jesus is saying, "It's not door No. 1. It's not Door No. 2. It's Door No. 3." I call it the *abundant life*.

I question whether any of us experience anything past the religious life. When I became a follower of Jesus, Door No. 3 was what I wanted. I was tired of life as normal. I didn't trust the religious life. It just made me feel guilty. I wanted the fresh newness of life, the life of those who are alive from the dead. I wanted it then and I want it still. I want it for you. How does that happen?

Last week we said that the abundant life comes to those who follow Jesus and that **the way that people follow Jesus is three-fold. First, they come to Jesus and they see.** Jesus comes along the original shore and says, "Hey, guys, follow Me." They come and check Him out, who He is, what He teaches, what He does, how He lives. "Come and see." The Good Shepherd comes with no guile, no false promises, no scary religion and He says, "Come. Learn My voice."

How many of you have ever picked up the phone and you know who it is even before the person tells you? How many of you have ever had a phone call from your mother? Okay, that's what I'm talking about. It's that unmistakable voice. Mom calls and wherever you are, whatever you are doing, you know exactly who is on the other end of the phone and that is long before caller ID. Yesterday Laura was downstairs talking and I knew she was talking to one of our daughters, not because of what she was saying but because of the tone of her voice. Her voice changes when she is talking to one of the girls. It becomes different. Jesus says, "You will never be able to have the abundant life unless you start to learn My voice."

Laura and I just celebrated our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, thirty years on the 30<sup>th</sup>. It was a great day but it reminded me of our 20<sup>th</sup> when I surprised her with a trip to England and Scotland. We were up in Scotland at a B&B that was like a restored farm. No kidding, they serenade you at night with the call of the bagpipers and they wake you up for breakfast with the call of the bagpipers. It was wonderful. It was like Brigadoon. We are at breakfast and Laura is squirming, she is so excited. She gets up from the breakfast table, grabs the camera and goes outside because she had seen sheep. Now my wife has this thing about sheep. Irish sheep look different from Chilean sheep. Chilean sheep look different from Israeli sheep and Scottish sheep. These must somehow be special. She's out there at this little sheep pen, taking picture after picture of the sheep. Then she reaches into the pen and goes, "Here, sheepie, sheepie" because that's Scottish for "Come here, please." The sheep, being intelligent, go all the way to the other end of the pen to get away from the crazy lady. Then all of a sudden a voice behind Laura goes, "Pa, Pa, come here" and one of the sheep bounces out of the middle of the group and goes over and starts to lick Laura's fingers. She turns around and there is this older gentleman standing there. She says, "How did you do that?" He goes, "Ah, I know them, lass. They're mine. This is Pa. He recognizes my voice." Mary, Joan, Tony, Jeff, Jesus knows your voice. He wants you to know *His* voice. Whether you are at work or school or home, if you are being pulled by different voices in different directions, do you know the voice of Jesus? He calls you toward a different kind of life.

Let me give you two hints for this. The first is, you will never hear the voice of Jesus unless you want to. You can hear Him speak once but then if you go, "Naw," you won't hear it. Often the reason we don't hear the voice of Jesus is because we don't stop and say, "Lord, speak to me." I'm not just talking about the 63 minutes that you spend in church every week. I'm talking about those times in the middle of traffic or sitting down with a cup of coffee or at night on your kid's bed. "Jesus, are You there? Talk to me." I'm talking about opening the Bible and hearing the voice of Jesus. It takes silence to listen.

The second hint that I have is for you to sort out the good voice from all of the bad voices out there. There are a lot of bad voices. The Good Shepherd says, "Come. Come to Me." You won't hear the Good Shepherd say, "Take notes." You will know it is not the voice of the Good Shepherd if you hear, "Get your act together and then come. Change and then come to church." That's religion. That's not the voice of Jesus. That's the religious shepherd, the Pharisee. You

will know it is not the voice of the Good Shepherd if the voice says, "You need to believe this about abortion. You need to believe that about gay marriage. You need to believe this about Syria." You get the idea. It is not the Good Shepherd if the voice says, "Change and then I'll love you." Jesus says it the other way around. Jesus says, "Come and come now. Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy-burdened." How many of you any time this week have felt weary and heavy-burdened? Anybody else felt tired? I would raise my feet if I had enough strength. "Come now and I'll get you. We can talk about change in the morning. We can talk about that healthy life you've always wanted, but come now." What is your God saying to you? So often the church says, "Change and then come" but Jesus just says, "Come as you are. Come and see that you can trust Me." And then Jesus says, "Don't just come and see, come and believe."

In today's story, Jesus said, "The Shepherd leads the flock out of the gate and all the flock who are His go behind Him because they trust His voice." **Come and see leads to come and believe.** The hope of the Gospel is not that you get into heaven after you die but that you can have a different kind of life here and now and have it with abundance.

I came here from the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. One of the young men who was a member of that church, Philip, got married shortly after I got there. He was about 6'19" tall and had, you know, impossibly bright teeth. He just looked like the all-American guy. Beautiful wife. Great job at a great advertising firm making great money. I thought it was sick, all of it. But he was a terrific young man. He joined a class of young couples that Laura and I taught and one day asked if we could go out to lunch. He goes, "I've got all this. Life could not be better but something is missing. I'm doing all the stuff that you say but something is missing. What is it?" I absolutely had no pearls of wisdom for him. I remember saying something like, "You might need to listen to Jesus more intently and to religion less and then move in that direction and see if things start to change."

We had this nice lunch, and a couple of months later he comes and says, "I've done it. It's true. Jesus is there and it's a different kind of life. I feel free." I said, "What happened?" and he goes, "I did what you told me to. I quit my job." I said, "No!" He said, "I listened to Jesus. You know, I have made my mark at this advertising firm. I've done wonderful things for Philip Morris, but I felt like I woke up one day and Jesus said, 'You will not sell death any more. Let's find a way to sell life.'"

He left the firm and took a huge cut in pay. His wife was concerned that her husband had become a madman and blamed it on me, but a year later, they were both abundantly alive because they had not only seen Jesus and believed Him, but they had started to move. Could I just give a little *caveat* here? I do not think that Jesus came to make people nice. I know that's heresy in Minnesota, but I don't think it's true. C. S. Lewis says,

Niceness'—wholesome, integrated personality—is an excellent thing. We must try by every medical, educational, economic, and political means in our power to produce a world where as many people as possible grow up *nice*; just like we must try to produce a world where all have plenty to eat. But we must not suppose that even if we succeeded in making everyone nice we should have saved their souls. A world of nice people, content in their niceness, looking no further . . . .

than Edina. I mean, looking no further

turned away from God, would be just as desperately in need of salvation as a miserable world—and might even be more difficult to save.

Jesus didn't come to make people nice. Jesus came for a different purpose. Lewis says,

Improvement is not redemption, though redemption always improves people even here and now and, in the end, improves them to a degree we cannot imagine. God became man to turn creatures into sons and daughters: not simply to produce better people of the old kind but to produce a new kind of person.

Christianity!

It is *not* like teaching a horse to jump better and better but like turning a horse into a winged creature . . . .

It's not nice. Lewis goes on,

This world is a great sculptor's shop. We are the statues and there's a rumor going around the shop that some of us are someday going to come to life.

"Come and see. Come and believe." The abundant life is on the road of trust, and it's different than you thought. Then in our story, Jesus says, "The sheep see the love of the Shepherd for the Shepherd lays down His life to give real life and He shares it." ***Come and see leads to come and believe leads to come and love.*** As the Shepherd loves the sheep, the sheep learn to follow and love the Shepherd. They begin to change because the way, the path that the Shepherd has them on, is different from other peoples' path. They are experiencing different life. They are learning in the end to love God more than success.

Laura and I are very privileged to have as two of our good friends Billy Graham's sister, Jean, and her husband, Billy's brother-in-law, Leighton Ford. Leighton is in his 80s, a great evangelist and a teacher and spiritual mentor of mine. I once was asking him, "How can you sit in church and not be critical when you are so much better than the preacher? You go to hundreds of thousands of church services. Why do you go to church?" And Leighton said, "Well, I really don't go to learn much any more. I go to be reminded of what a great God there is and what a great sinner I am. I go to be reminded." He said, "John, you can learn, but I need to be reminded from my head to my heart to my hands that Jesus loves me, and that changes me."

I had said last week that if you only buy one book this year, you should buy John Ortberg's *Who Is This Man?* [*Who Is This Man?: The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus*]. It's a great talk about Jesus and how His life and love changes people. Ortberg says,

Something about Jesus keeps prodding people to GO OUT, to do far beyond: Francis of Assisi gives up his possessions, Augustine gives up his mistress, John Newton gives up his slave trade, and Father Damien gives up his health . . . Jesus inspires . . . .

Remember *inspiration* from last week? Jesus inspires, breathes on,

Leo Tolstoy, the Russian novelist, who in turn inspires Mohandas Gandhi, who in turn inspires Martin Luther King Jr. He inspires Desmond Tutu to dream up and pray up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and stops South Africa from going up in flames.

All that was in this book. When Jesus comes close and we learn to hear His voice and when we follow His voice, over time we start to love Him and our lives change. I know that because last night at 5:15 in this room, Jesus was there sitting next to Betsy. Jesus gives Betsy the grace to deal with life in a wheelchair and the loss of a spouse. And in this room over here, Jesus came and met Patty and gave her the chance to be sober again and have real life. And in this room almost always right up there is 19-year-old Louie, who comes whenever he is in town. Jesus offers him the reassurance that He loves him and he's not alone even when he's hundreds of miles from here. Jesus has shown him a different kind of life, the fresh newness of life of those who are alive from the dead, who are not going to settle for anything different.

If we stumble and fall and go back through Door No. 1, the normal life door, we find that's not satisfying. Or if we stagger into the religious door because maybe it will help, we find that religion doesn't help at all. But when we listen for the voice of the Savior and follow the Shepherd a different way, we find abundant life. I think some of you long for that. You want so much to have the eternal life that begins now as children of the King, but you are tired of religion. I think some of you have lost abundance in your lives because you have confused it with religion. You have become neurotic about being good enough and you think you are not hearing Jesus because you are not good enough. That's not it. Some of you have lost abundance in your lives because you have confused it with success, however you define success, whether that is at school or at work or at home. You are hearing so many other voices tell you whether you are doing well or badly that you cannot hear the voice of the Good Shepherd. Some of you have lost abundance in your lives because you have confused it with the pain that you are experiencing, emotional or physical. It may be financial, about your career, but you have lost hope and you need to hear among all the voices in the world just one voice. Let's listen for that voice together.

Lord Jesus, we come to this place the way people came so many years ago to hear Your voice. I ask for my friends who are so religious that they think they are not good enough to hear Your voice, for my friends who are so successful that they are afraid to hear Your voice, tell them to go a different way, and for my friends who hurt so much that they can't hear anything. I pray that You will be the Good Shepherd, who sees that one is missing and goes and finds that one and says, "Come. Come to Me and I will give you life in all of its abundance." In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Spirit we ask. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*