

## Gospel lesson

Today's Gospel reading comes just after Jesus had healed a blind man and thrown the temple into a tizzy about truly seeing God's actions versus making false accusations of sin.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/gnpi-063-good-shepherd/>;  
credit: Good News Productions International  
and College Press Publishing

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**John 10:1-10**

NRSV

<sup>1</sup>Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit.

<sup>2</sup>The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.

<sup>3</sup>The gatekeeper opens the gate 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 out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.

<sup>5</sup>They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers."

<sup>6</sup>Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

<sup>7</sup> So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.

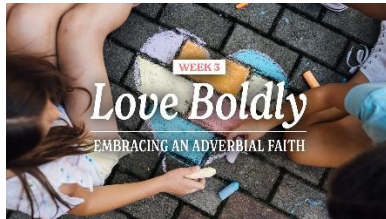
<sup>8</sup> All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them.

<sup>9</sup> I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.

<sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

*The Word of God for the people of God*

<Interactive time>



picture from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/miracle-sunday-worship-study-resources#worship-series>

Our (bishops') vision: The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections.

### Week 3 - Love Boldly

Is it easy to go up to someone who loves you and strike up a conversation? <Let them respond>

Do you find it easy to go up to a stranger by yourself and strike up a conversation?

<Let them respond>

What helps to do that more easily? <Let them respond>

What about giving a demonstration in front of someone you think does not like you (versus in front of someone who loves you)? <Let them respond>

Who inspires you to try things you have not done before, to step out of your comfort zone?  
<Let them respond>

Usually when we try something new, it helps to have someone we love and trust there, encouraging us. Do you love and trust Jesus? <Let them respond>

What did Jesus tell us to do? <Let them respond; cite greatest commandments>

What kind of effect do you think that can have on the world? <Let them respond>

Even if we only affect one person at a time, love has transformative power – and God is the source of all love. We are called to share that love boldly, to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

*<resume sharing screen in Zoom – public domain hymn>*

*<Hymn “Lead Me, Lord”*

*UMH #473>*

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## Message: Knowing that Voice



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/stories-that-matter/week-3-fourth-sunday-of-easter-year-a/week-3-fourth-sunday-of-easter-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Good Shepherd who knows us intimately,  
as we take time now to further consider today's  
scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That by hearing Your voice, we may love more boldly  
and all may know you & live abundantly. Amen.

We are "Knowing that Voice" in the "Stories That Matter" series today:

"Like sheep, we learn to recognize the Shepherd's voice together. ~~Worship this week focuses~~ [Let us focus] on discernment as a communal practice and listening for Christ's call to abundant life."

Once when my nephews were young, our extended family went out to eat at a family restaurant. The kids were playing and briefly scooted into the next room. We heard one cry out, and my sister immediately got up to go take care of her son. My other sister wondered how, out of all the possible kids in the restaurant, Laurie knew it was Brian - at the same time she (Vicki) knew it was not one of hers.

Most parents know the sound of their children's voices, and the children know their parents' voices. In healthy homes, children learn to trust that those they love will take care of them. If they get lost, they may seek help for finding their parents.

In unhealthy homes, children do not learn that trust. If they get lost, they may try to do things self-sufficiently, suspicious of those who offer help.

Much of this world today involves people who were not raised in healthy-faith homes; they do not really know or trust the love of God. They are lost in a sin-filled wilderness, where they do not feel safe in relying on others.

Ezekiel speaks to Israelites during the exile, when they were lost in a sin-filled wilderness. He explains that God is still with the people, describes the destruction of the temple as punishment for apostasy, laments Israel's fate and proclaims oracles against various nations before getting into plans for the restoration of Israel as God's people.

Today's reading is full of good news for the Israelites, confirming that even without the temple, God hears them, is still with them, and works for their well-being. The psalmist today rings out with joy about God's steadfast love.

Jesus expands upon Ezekiel's imagery of the people being sheep who know God as their shepherd. He had been in the temple, almost getting stoned for telling people there who He was; they were blind to the

truth. After healing a physically blind man, Jesus implied the Pharisees were blind because they would not see Jesus as the Messiah. The Pharisees said, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" to which Jesus replied, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

It is at this point that Jesus starts talking about those who try to steal the sheep versus the shepherd who both the gatekeeper and the sheep know. Those who believe in Him have open hearts to recognize His call on their lives - in essence, they recognize Jesus as the voice to follow. Jesus brings abundant life and His followers trust that He will care for them.

How many people do we know today that truly trust God to take care of them? That were taught healthy faith, encouraged to ask questions, to seek help in times of suffering, to live in love and to lovingly help others because God loves us so much? Who are able to recognize the Holy Spirit's call on their lives?

How many do we know that have turned away from the church, unable to trust because they were exposed to unhealthy faith? That were told to submit to what they were told by someone in power, not to ask questions, to suffer without complaint because Jesus suffered for us, to serve and live in fear instead of in love? Who do not see God at work in this world?

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. Jesus came that all may have life, and have it abundantly.

What is it like for a person raised in a healthy home to deal with someone raised in an abusive home? The former may be dismayed and hurt by the way the latter treats them. In the same way, those who live in Jesus's love may be dismayed and hurt by those who only know sin - especially if those hurting them are in secular power over them.

Still, we are called to love one another and treat others with Christ's love. We teach others of healthy living and healthy faith by our example, by our insistence on the better way.

The first letter of Peter touches on that in today's reading. This passage has unfortunately been twisted by false shepherds to demand that slaves and oppressed people accept abuse silently - but Jesus never taught that. Jesus suffered for the sake of those who were not in power, who could not help themselves, to rescue those who would be lost.

When it came to those abusing their place in society, Jesus absolutely objected and pressed for change - perhaps the most dramatic moment of that was His overturning the tables in the temple. Today he called them thieves and bandits trying to steal His sheep - and we see such people in modern society too.

We know that God loves us, and we can trust God to protect us and provide what is best for us to grow in love. Jesus calls us to a close personal relationship with Him - and with one another, for we are not alone. So, if we are going to endure suffering, let it be for the right reasons - our choice to help and

nurture God's people, not to let someone abuse us.

Jesus loves us boldly - he stood up to those who misused God's name in the way they treated others. He calls us to love God and to love others similarly.

What does loving boldly look like? I recently saw a snippet from a Ted Talk by Malala Yousafzai<sup>1</sup> which listed three things that I think we can do in God's love:

- ✦ **Start somewhere** - pick an injustice or a need that you can identify in our community, and start there. Do not worry about how much there is to do - we are not in this alone, and God will use others to help. Do not wait for a perfect moment or to plan out everything - just do your part in this moment, in this place where you are.
- ✦ **Work with others** - again, we are not alone. Talk with others about ways you can all contribute your unique gifts toward fixing the bigger problems of which the little thing you addressed was a symptom. You've heard the saying "Many hands make light work" - be some of those hands.
- ✦ **Stay ambitious** - God's kingdom of love is worth everything - do not give up it after a few successes, but let the Holy Spirit keep building upon what you accomplished through your continued work. God has great plans for us - embrace them!

*<resume sharing screen in Zoom - public domain hymns>*

Because we know God's voice, be bold in striving to

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ted.com/talks/malala\\_yousafzai\\_what\\_i\\_got\\_wrong\\_about\\_changing\\_the\\_world](https://www.ted.com/talks/malala_yousafzai_what_i_got_wrong_about_changing_the_world)

bring God's kingdom on this earth! Be bold in showing the love of Jesus to all people, that the sin in their lives may be overcome! Be bold in letting the Holy Spirit's power fill you as a disciple of Jesus Christ, for the transformation of the world!