

In 1852, in Ireland, Cecil Alexander penned the Words of this hymn, “Jesus Calls Us O’er the Tumult” (CW 463). We may understand, “Jesus calls us...” for he calls us in his Word – to hear, to believe and to obey. But what is this “TUMULT”? It is a loud confused noise like the sounds of battle or the winds and crashing waves in a storm at sea. The hymn writer goes on to describe it as such, “Of our life’s wild, restless sea”. In the storms of life Jesus calls, “Christian follow me!” In 1852, in Ireland, there were life’s storms. Ireland had lost 20-25% of its population in the late 1840’s and early 1850’s. The country was decimated by the great “Potato Famine” their main source of food due to a blight. Many starved and many immigrated to America – a strange new land. Families were torn apart!

In this sin-filled world there will always be a measure of TUMULT – LOUD, CONFUSED NOISE that at times seeks to drown out the sweet words of Jesus. If it is not different political views or class warfare or economic models it will be something else. Today it is the corona virus—tomorrow it will be replaced by another TUMULT. But “Jesus calls us over the Tumult”. He whispers, “Christian, follow me!” Not because life will always be easy—but because I will give you a hope and comfort that the tumult of life in this world cannot steal from you.

We warn our children about following strangers – listening to their promises. Yet, sadly, too many children today have never heard the sweet call of Jesus. In many cases it is because parents have stopped listening to Jesus’ call and failed to share it with their children. Today, we are reminded that Jesus is the Good Shepherd – the one who in Love gave his life for the sheep (sinful mankind) – to bring us life! He calls us in his Word to follow him. And he lays out this promise – for those who continue to hear his voice:

THEME: THEY WILL NEVER FOLLOW AFTER STRANGERS!

I. THOSE WHO ENTER THE ONE GATE

II. THOSE WHO FIND THE ABUNDANT LIFE

It is amazing how many question the truth that Jesus is the only way to heaven! Even leaders of Christian denominations, who want to be open-minded, often say that heaven will be opened up for all ‘good people’, even if they do not believe in Jesus, as Savior from sin.

If you have some difficulty understanding completely the meaning of what Jesus speaks in our text – don’t feel bad. Jesus used a figure of speech, not a parable – more like a proverb (a wise saying) and the people did not understand. Jesus explains it for us. In this Proverb, he pictures a sheep pen. Normally in the evening hours, the shepherds of that time in Palestine would bring their sheep in from grazing and keep them in a common pen or a corral made up of stones. The sheep would be safe there from thieves and wild animals. The one gate to the pen was guarded by the gatekeeper. In the morning, the shepherd would enter the gate, call out his sheep from the mixture of flocks and lead them out to pasture again.

In the Proverb, Jesus says this is normally the case: 1) Shepherds go into the sheep pen through the Gate; 2) Thieves and robbers sneak in over the wall; 3) Sheep listen and follow the voice of their own shepherd; and 4) Sheep will never follow strangers. What point was Jesus making? The emphasis is not on the sheep or the shepherd but on the GATE. **“Therefore Jesus said again, I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.”** Lest there be any doubt, I am the one, the only gate to the sheep pen. The sheep are clearly true believers. The shepherds are faithful servants of God – pastors, teachers and leaders. The only Gate to safety is Jesus. **“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.”**

All of us need the safety that is offered through the One Gate – Jesus. Every one of us is a sinner and deserves to suffer eternally for our sin. The Lord describes us as he speaks through the Psalm writer (14:3), **“All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is NO ONE who does good, NOT EVEN ONE.”** That includes the seemingly innocent baby, the average person walking down the street, church leaders, and the pastor. All have sinned. All deserve God’s punishment. Do you really believe that? We need only look at our shallow thankfulness. In this time of crisis (TUMULT), how often have we thanked God for the measure of good health, food, clothing and shelter that we do enjoy? Rather, how often have we complained or cheered on those who complain of lost income and opportunities? Do we pause to ask, ‘How can I get rid of this sin and guilt?’

Some neither worry about sin nor guilt. Why? Because it is so easy to invent NEW GATES into heaven. To play the comparison game, ‘I’m as good as my Christian neighbor!’ Or, to down-play the seriousness and the consequence of sin by saying, ‘I’m a ‘good person’ or my children are ‘good children!’ But this simply will not work. Jesus later told his disciples, **“ I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6** There is only one GATE into heaven – JESUS! His terrible death on the cross paid the full price for all our sin and guilt! His voice call us over the TUMULT OF THIS LIFE! Listen to his promise! Believe! And every one of us who believes his promise has entered the one (narrow) Gate. And the Lord promises, **“They will never follow after strangers!”**

So many provide “other” gates. Jesus says, **“All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers.”** Jesus points to the many false prophets and false Messiahs who came before him – he says that they were thieves and robbers, intent on stealing and killing and destroying the sheep, BELIEVERS. The scandals that regularly rock the electronic ministries and mega-churches should not surprise us. For decades, the false teachings of the many have been obvious – the abuse of privilege, position, money, and power could be seen in life-styles. The Gospel of Christ has often been replaced with a man-centered Gospel – that Christians should always be happy and healthy and wealthy – Prosperity Gospel. Is it surprising that such high class entertainment should deceive so many? So many who claim to have entered through the one Gate – Jesus Christ! No. But you, enter through the one gate – Jesus. Thrust him alone!

II. There is an old saying, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make them drink.” You can put an animal’s nose right in the water, but if it isn’t thirsty, if it doesn’t want to drink, it won’t! Perhaps, we could say it another way, ‘You can drag a young person or an adult to church, you can make them act like a Christian, but if they don’t want to, as soon as the pressure is gone, they will follow strangers. Only those who recognize that Jesus alone gives the truly abundant life will never follow strangers.

Jesus uses the picture of shepherd and sheep to describe that abundant life, **“They will come in and go out and find pasture.”** Sheep that know the abundant life, have freedom to come in and go out of the safety of the sheep pen, and find pasture. They have rich grass to nourish their bodies!

As God’s people – his sheep – we have freedom to feed – to taste of his Word every day of our lives. Yes, to have an abundant life filled with comfort in forgiveness for the times we have sinned and failed. To see his will for us in our lives and to find motivation to live for him. Jesus came to give us an abundant, full life.

Sometimes the TUMULT OF LIFE, the loud, confused noise of the Sinful World seems to drown out the sweet call of Jesus to the abundant life. Perhaps, you have heard of ‘Healing Dolls’. They have taken many forms over the years. Quite a number of years ago, I saw an advertisement for 6 healing dolls from the jungles of Perididdas. The writer said, ‘I want you to enjoy a life of joy and happiness...of wealth and good fortune.’ There was a healing doll for Money, for Love, for Protection, for Luck, for Health and for Power. As silly as this sounds, I am sure that there were many who spent the \$15 plus shipping and handling for a piece of the ‘good life’. We would not be so easily deceived!

Or would we? Sometimes, we are in danger of saying one thing and living in an entirely different way. Don’t we at times say with the Lord, **“But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that” I Timothy 6:8** How quickly that thought can be lost between the home and the checkout counter. Hamburger can be replaced by a taste for steak. Basic transportation replaced with vehicles that have all the latest gadgets. A simple vacation in a tent with the desire to take the kids or the grandkids to Disney World. Luxuries become necessities. And how quickly we forget, **“A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” Jesus Luke 12:15**

Most people today think of the abundant life in terms of having money or possessions or power. Freedom to do whatever we want to do! But these are just strangers that we and our children and our grandchildren can go running after. Strangers that in the end will destroy!

But there is a totally different kind of abundant life—the kind that Jesus gives.

A life filled with Peace knowing that in Christ our sins are forgiven! **Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,**

A life of Contentment with our material possessions knowing that God gives us everything we need. **Hebrews 13:5 “be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”**

A life filled with Joy (even in difficult times) because our hearts and minds are overflowing the promises of God’s Word.

John 15:11 “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

A Life filled with Hope knowing that the best is yet to come – as we look ahead to the time when we will be with Jesus in heaven. **Titus 2:13 “we wait for the blessed hope-the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ”**

JESUS CALLS US OVER THE TUMULT. Life offers a lot of distractions. Loud and confused noise that attempts to silence the quiet call of Jesus. Much like the clatter of pots and pans in the kitchen can drown out “the game” or the sound of the hammer or saw rises over the music on the radio. Listen when Jesus calls in his Word. More than anything else it is our privilege as Christians, as parents, as mothers and fathers to lay hold of and to share such abundant life with our children and those around us. What would you change if you could? One mother thoughtfully said, ‘Above all, I’d try harder to bring a simple, genuine love of Jesus into their hearts at an early age. Oh, we worshipped daily, we helped them memorize Scripture. We never missed church. We did all the prescribed things. But I was too shy...I didn’t know how to show them the Jesus I adored.’ It is never too late! The Word is powerful! Say it simply in your own words – the abundant life in Jesus! Share the Jesus you adore! Then Jesus assures us that those who enter the one Gate, who have found his abundant life in Jesus, WILL NEVER FOLLOW AFTER STRANGERS! AMEN

Pastor Glen Hellwig, St. Peter Lutheran Church