

**“MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB”****John 10:1-10    April 30, 2023**

A very successful lawyer parked his brand-new Lexus in front of his office, ready to show it off to his colleagues. As he got out, a truck passed too close and completely tore the door off the driver’s side. The counselor immediately grabbed his cell phone, dialed 911, and within minutes a policeman pulled up.

Before the officer had a chance to ask any questions, the lawyer started screaming hysterically. His Lexus, which he had just picked up the day before, was now completely ruined and would never be the same, no matter what the body shop did to it.

When the lawyer finally wound down from his ranting and raving, the officer shook his head in disgust and disbelief. **“I can’t believe how materialistic you lawyers are,”** he said. **“You are so focused on your possessions that you don’t notice anything else.”**

**“How can you say such a thing?”** asked the lawyer.

The cop replied, **“Don’t you know that your left arm is missing from the elbow down? It must have been torn off when the truck hit you.”**

The lawyer looked down at his missing forearm and screamed. **“Ahhh! Where’s my Rolex!”**

Someone wrote, **“Living the good life”** and living *a good life* are not the same thing. As a people of faith, we know that the accumulation of things and wealth have little to do with a good life or a well-lived life, let alone make us happy and satisfied. And yet, I’m not sure we really know what a well-lived life is. While we might not be as self-centered as the lawyer and his Lexus, we still get confused in this area.

Some people would say a good life is having lots of friends, a big family, and several grandchildren. For others it is living a long healthy life. Some would define a good life as being well traveled, highly educated, or meeting our personal goals. A good life may be more altruistic, helping others, being part of a non-profit organization, contributing to society, or just improving the lives of others. Perhaps a good life can be defined by our character, with qualities such as integrity, kindness, or compassion. Certainly, I would not debate some of these outlooks. They do add to life and certainly make it a lot more interesting if not a lot more enjoyable.

Yet, I think Jesus brings something to the table when it comes to a good life. **"The thief comes only to steal and destroy," he says. "I have come so that [my people] may have life and have it abundantly."** With these words, three profound things are made clear to us. **First**, a good life has nothing to do with violence, harming others, nor deceiving and taking advantage of others to get ahead. A life set on such things is not good. **Secondly, Jesus affirms our desire for a well-lived life.** One of the goals of his ministry is to make sure that we experience a full life as God intended it. This is good news. **Thirdly, Jesus claims to be the one who can fully deliver a well lived life.** Therefore, if you're serious about arriving at the end of your life spent, satisfied, and fulfilled, then examining what Jesus brings to life, to make it abundant, is worth some serious effort.

## **I. ENTER THE RIGHT GATE DOOR**

Have you ever gone through the wrong door? My old high school did a major renovation of its 1920 building, while I was attending. They installed smaller lockers, lower ceilings, and energy efficient windows. However, they changed the bathrooms around with tub-like sinks set outside in the hallways. The problem was with the signage. They were placed near the ceiling, flat against the wall, and were small. One day I was rushing to hit the restroom before the next class, not paying attention, I walked into the girls room. Fortunately, no one was inside although I

overheard a couple gals from the hallway mention that guy is in the wrong room. How embarrassing!

Life offers several choices of doors to walk through, some lead us to better places than others. Interestingly, Jesus refers to himself as “**the gate or door**” in this passage. He is specifically speaking about a sheepgate and his first century audience would get the image. However, we miss the fact that when shepherds were keeping their flock in the field, they would often bed them down for the night in a cave, a natural rock formation, or surrounding shrubbery. This protected the sheep from predators and from wandering off. However, these field pens did not have actual gates. Instead, a shepherd would lay down and sleep in front of the opening, thus his body was the living gate. Sheep wouldn’t climb over him, especially in the dark. Get the picture?

When Jesus said, “**I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture.**” He is claiming to be the door, the living gate, the one who lays his life down for the followers, and most importantly, the one who leads them to the good life. Jesus defines a good life as one that is connected to God, through faith and obedience.

The late mystic **Meister Eckhart** used the **ground** as a metaphor to speak about this God connection. The ground of God is the deepest depths of God. And in the generosity of God, the deepest depths of God are given to us as the deepest depths of ourselves, in our nothingness without God. **Our ground and God’s ground is one ground.** And hidden down in the depths of ourselves, is a union that’s already present, waiting to be realized, lived, and shared.

A good life is one that is grounded in God. Jesus affirms this by including the phrase, “**come in and go out and find pasture.**” It means that our lives are absolutely safe and secure in God’s hands. We are blessed. The good news is this good life is not based on our circumstances, achievements, bank account, degrees,

hardships, nor family situations. We don't have to invent our purpose. We have a ground to stand on, all this has been accomplished in Christ. We just need to surrender to it and drop things that hinder it. But things get even better.

## II. WE ARE KNOWN

Dale Carnegie said, "**A person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.**" Jesus said, "**He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.**"

You may not know this, but the Palestinian shepherds did not raise sheep for eating as much as for their wool. Thus, the sheep were with the shepherd a long time, most living at least 12 years. Being the shepherd was with the sheep day in and day out they knew each other well. The sheep knew the shepherds voice and the various call sounds he would make to get their attention and direct them. The sheep would run from strangers. Even if two shepherds mixed their flocks at the watering hole, the sheep would separate and follow the voice of the individual shepherd. Every night, when the sheep went into the field pen, the shepherd would lay his staff across the gate. The sheep would go under it and the shepherd would do a quick inspection of their condition. The shepherd was devoted to his sheep.

In a book simply called **Prayer**, **Simon Tugwell** writes, "Another picture that our Lord loves to use is that of the shepherd who goes out to look for the sheep that is lost. So long as we imagine that it is we who have to look for God, then we must often lose heart. But it is the other way about. God is looking for us. And so we can afford to recognize that very often we are not looking for God, far from it, we are in full flight from him, in high rebellion against him. And he knows that and has taken it into account. He has followed us into our own darkness; there where we thought finally to escape him, we run straight into his arms. So we do not have to erect a

false piety for ourselves, to give us hope of salvation. Our hope is in his determination save us. And he will not give in!”

Jesus lays out a beautiful picture of the kind of relationship people who have grounded their lives in God. Jesus knows and calls each of us by name. Jesus loves his people and is watching over our well-being. Jesus speaks so that we know the sound of his voice and can follow where he leads.

We don't have to make a name for ourselves. We have already been given one. We don't have to find love. It has already found us. We are known, we are grounded, we are blessed, we can come in and go out without fear – all the signs of a good life.

### **III. A LIFE OF EXCITEMENT**

There is a story about an Episcopal priest who was shopping for a **Harley-Davidson** motorcycle. The salesman talked about speed, acceleration, risk and how women love to climb up on the back of such a powerful machine. Then, he discovered his customer was a priest.

Immediately, he changed his approach. He spoke soberly about good mileage, the advantages of 360-degree visibility and how practical motorcycles are.

Writing about the experience later, the priest had this to say: "**Have we told the world that being a Christian is more like riding a lawnmower than a motorcycle? Is the life of faith more safe and sound or dangerous and exciting? The common image of the church is pure lawnmower -- slow, deliberate and plodding. Our task is to take the church out on the open road, give it the gas and see what this baby will do!**"

Perhaps people haven't looked at the Christian faith as being the good life because we haven't demonstrated what a wondrous risk-taking adventure it is. Perhaps we have grown so cautious and afraid to offend anyone we never speak the truth. Perhaps we have forgotten that Jesus calls us not only into the deep waters, but to actually get out of the boat and step on the waters. Perhaps we have gone through

the same old spiritual routines for so long that we are no longer being stretched nor tuned into the voice of our Shepherd. Perhaps we have forgotten that Mission is a hands on, sent out effort, where we eat with the hungry, comfort the bereaved, build homes with the homeless, give shelter to those on the street, advocate on behalf of the powerless, welcome the immigrants, sit with the lonely, and worship with all our might. Perhaps it means meeting with our neighbors and engaging our city officials in projects that need accomplished. This doesn't mean we have to be the life of the party, and then again, what life are we bringing to the party?

When we think about a good life:

- **What can be of greater importance than connecting those who are estranged from God with the grace, mercy and reconciliation of God?**
- **What is more significant than proclaiming the arrival of a new and desperately needed kingdom through word, sacrament and acts of mercy and love?**
- **What possibly matters more than binding up the hurts of the broken and the hearts of the weary with tangible love and a message of peace from above?**

Following Jesus satisfies our sense of, and thirst for, adventure. We have the opportunity to listen for the call of God and to lay it out there for this cause -- if we want to. God invites us to get up, gear up and get out into the world to make a difference -- to make God's world known in this world. That sounds pretty exciting to me! It sounds like a life worth living. How about you? Amen.

**First Presbyterian Church in Hawley**  
**Sunday, April 30, 2023**  
**Second Scripture Lesson**

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**John 10:1-10**

**10**“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.

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be To God.**