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*The God Who Heals:  
Designed for Abundance*  
John 10:1-10

I don't know about you, but I have amazing conversations on Sunday morning. I am convinced that those conversations fall into just two categories: #1, huge pain in people's lives or #2, incredible stories of redemption... there really is no middle ground and definitely no small talk!

"I don't want to surrender to go to Celebrate Recovery."

For this young man, this really meant "I don't want to surrender to God yet", but we have a very determined God who, in His love, will pursue us until we surrender when we are fed up, or those around us become fed up and change becomes the only option. Many will seek change only when they are faced with the potential loss of something they are not prepared to live without.

This morning we get a glimpse of one of the watershed texts in the Gospel of John. We will get just a flash of its brilliance today, and then we'll dig deeper in when Pastor Mark takes us back to this text in 6 weeks.

John 10:1-10:

"Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

"Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Remember, John was very intentional about what teachings of Jesus he included in his account. Here John wants us to get a critical element of who Christ is and why he has come. He is creating a beautiful contrast between Jesus as the Good Shepherd and those who would mislead the sheep and distort the nature of God.

Here in the west our view of what a shepherd does comes from watching too many cowboy movies. We saw cattle drives, lots of yelling, whipping, pushing resistant cows. Palestinian shepherds didn't have sheep drives, they had sheep follows they lead and call the sheep to follow and usually they do because the shepherd had earned their trust. John wants us to get the fact that Jesus has his sheep's best interest at heart, wants his children to follow him because they trust him because they know he loves them - know that there are hungry wolves out there dying to get their teeth into us and that staying close to the shepherd is a very good idea!

John also wants us to understand that there are other shepherds who are not motivated by love, nurture and benevolent oversight. Those "thieves" Jesus refers to would mislead the sheep and distort the nature of God. In fact, the text says those thieves "purpose", their reason for existing is to "kill and steal and destroy", Jesus' purpose is what? To bring life... life abundant.

Jesus desperately wants to heal his people, to bring abundant life. The Greek here implies a "superabundance of a thing", more than our capacity! So one of the ways he heals us is to teach us who we are to follow, to see our choices very clearly! If we don't get this right we will be led not to more abundance of life than we can imagine but to be killed, robbed and destroyed!

John 10:10 is one of the most frequently used scriptures in the Christian faith, but usually the focus is on the second part of the verse "I have come that you might have life" not the first part "the thief comes to kill, rob and destroy" it is that part of the verse that we will focus on today. Why you say? "That's a little twisted you say! Why not focus on the positive rather than the negative?" Well, I firmly believe that we can't get the good stuff, the abundant life, without a solid understanding of who the heck the thief is and what he has done in your life! Are you in? Great, here we go!

First of all, there were thieves in Jesus' time and there are thieves in our lives today. They distort truth... who God really is, and they also distort our identity... who we really are! Nothing made Jesus truly angry like these thieves because they didn't just lead the sheep down the wrong path, they misled them about who the Father is! This still makes Jesus incredibly angry! But there is someone lurking in the shadows behind those thieves, someone even more sinister, using them as his agents...that is **the** thief. The thief is known by many names, Satan, Lucifer, the Enemy... but his purpose, his reason for being, his mission in life is to kill, rob and destroy. He loves to oppose God and anyone who seeks to follow God. He has

robbed all of us, he has taken things from us that were gifts from God - standard equipment necessary to live the abundant life that we so deeply crave.

Like an expert pick pocket he has taken our wallets and we don't know it yet. The great tragedy is that after many of us discover that you are missing your wallet you shrug your shoulders and resign yourself to the loss. What is the reasonable response to having your pocket picked? You are mad as hell, right? You would crawl over broken glass to get it back right?

Everyone who has spent 5 minutes in this sin soaked world has lost something to the thief. So what has the thief taken from you? (pause)

It might be the ability to trust, or the ability to thrive in intimate relationships, to hope for the goodness we are designed for, to love ourselves for who God created us to be.

What is it for you? You have to know and you have to be as determined to get it back as God is for you to be restored to wholeness. So many believers that I speak with are resigned to write it off, accept it as gone for good and to accept what is as what is normal. The Good Shepherd is begging us to accept his help in having it restored.

This is what recovery is...it is recovering what has been taken from us. It is not just stopping destructive behaviors. Those behaviors usually are simply our efforts to kill the pain of what the thief has taken. God wants to help us recover, to be restored to wholeness.

One of the most destructive ways the thief attacks us is distorting our identity. Our God given identity is as a beloved child of God, gifted and created by Him and after He created us He pronounced us "good". He looks at us and sees not our failures but our beauty, not our inadequacy but our adequacy in Christ once we have surrendered to Him!

The thief on the other hand distorts that God driven identify. He plants a lie in our hearts that make us believe we can't, we will always fall short, are defective and unlovable unless we are thin, gorgeous, rich, powerful, strong... and on and on. The lie makes us adopt a metric that will never allow us to feel good enough. The lie kills our ability to feel beloved, robs us of our ability to see our beauty and that of those around us, he destroys our ability to dream big God sized dreams.

If the lie goes unchallenged it will hold us hostage and rob us of the joy of living.

For me the lie was I was "Unlovable, rejected, abused and hopeless".

I am thankful I belong to a church full of believers who are willing to be honest about the lies that they have battled.

Many of you know my story. My father was a Harvard educated attorney who controlled our home with rage, intimidation and physical and emotional abuse. I became my mother's protector, and I paid dearly for it. As a child he beat me repeatedly for standing up to him, and then would stand over me and tell me that I was not his son... that I would never succeed at anything.

Our pastor who did marriage counseling for my parents described him as the one soulless man he had ever met. I grew up never feeling safe, feeling that I was seriously flawed if my own father told me I was already a failure at 8 years old, and wondering if there was a God somewhere who felt differently about me.

As an adult I was involved in ministry for years where I would speak to large groups of people about God's love (for them) but never really experience it myself. The pain of the past served as a barrier to God's healing touch. I would entertain people with stories of my crazy dysfunctional family and be totally unaware of the great pain I still carried.

It wasn't till I began recovery that I entered honest Christian community, acknowledged my pain, and allowed God to heal it over a period of several years. I wish it had been possible for my healing to happen in the blink of an eye, but for me I needed this time to establish new behaviors and beliefs about God, myself and others. During this time I was able to go to my dying father and pray with him after he had accepted Christ himself. I held all 80 lbs of him in my arms and we wept together. He died a few days later. The pastor was wrong, he did have a soul. And mine was restored as well.

(Turn cardboard over: "beloved by my Father, heir to the King, committed father and husband"... This is what my insides look like most days now!

What is your story? Maybe you will find yours in some of these testimonies...

[Cardboard Testimonies]

Without Christ's great sacrifice on the cross, all we would ever see would be the front side with no hope of ever getting to the back side. We would be stuck with this identity and have no hope of ever receiving this abundant life our Savior offers us.

Without recovering the truth about myself, I would have lived a very different life than I live today. Today, because I challenged the thief's lie and recovered the truth about myself, I know what God created me to be.

None of us has arrived, none completely healed but we must know what our destination is, where the Good Shepherd is taking us. And you must know what He is calling you to do in order to get there!

- It may be committing to Celebrate Recovery - both Thursday nights and doing a CR Step Study.
- It may be counseling – either individually or in a group
- It may be working with a spiritual director or plan a spiritual retreat – alone!
- And it may be allowing yourself to be prayed for more than once by those gifted in this area
- But my best advice, do it all! I did. I wish I didn't have to, but for me that is what it took! Whatever you do though, go the distance! I hear people say "Oh, CR didn't work for me" Really? It has worked for hundreds of thousands of people but there is something that special about you? It works if you work it!!

As you can see, some of us have profound and dramatic wounding and some more subtle but we all are wounded. We have all been robbed of something we have to recover so don't buy the lie that you don't have work to do. If you are not experiencing life abundantly then you better get busy!

At this point, I invite you to name the lie the enemy/thief told us about ourselves—and then write it down.

"I have come that you might have life, and life to the full" we want that don't we? Our hearts are crying out for it! But we can't have it unless we know who we are, as long as the thief is allowed to distort our identity as His children!

Now name the truth that Jesus tells about us. The truth that we are his sheep, precious to him, redeemed, loved. **Named**—we have a name he has given us that no one can erase. We name it, then we write it down.

I invite you to hold our cards in our open hands in our laps, and come into the Lord's presence. Tell the Good Shepherd the lie, and thank him for the truth he has pronounced over us.

Will you confront the thief? Will you take back your true identity in Christ? Life to the full awaits... what will that be like? Let's find out together, okay!

## Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.

- DIG DEEPER

1. What do you think was the most important point in the sermon? Why is it important?

2. What other reflections do you have about the sermon?

3. How do you think the sermon applies to us as a congregation?

4. What is it that God wants you to do as a result of hearing this sermon?