

Easter 4, 2008
Good Hope Lutheran Church
John 10: 1 – 10

Once again today, the sermon text is drawn from the Gospel lesson, found this week in John chapter 10. The words of Jesus, the good shepherd; Jesus, the gate, by whom we enter, into the Father's kingdom.

The Lord be with you. And let us pray:
Heavenly Father, we want to be a part of your Kingdom in heaven, yet we insist on going our own way here on earth. Forgive us our prideful hearts and our wandering ways, and lead us back to you by the only road available—the cross and empty tomb of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, AMEN.

I believe the Gospel lesson for today can be summarized in one single, simple sentence. Folks. There are no shortcuts in life. There are no shortcuts, and we know that, we do. But we keep trying to take shortcuts anyway.

Diet and health, for example. Diet and health, by now we ought to know that the best and only way to long term good health is a sensible diet, easy on the desserts, with exercise a daily habit. We know that for our kids and for ourselves, fruit is better than donuts, milk is better than soda pop, and a home cooked meal is always going to be healthier than Applebees. We know the value of exercise, of playing games not just watching them on television, we get all that by now, right? But individually and as a nation, what do we do instead? Munching potato chips while ESPN rolls on, latching on to diet fads and diet pills and diet gurus, hoping for an easy fix. But folks, there are no easy fixes. There are no short cuts. There is instead the difficult task of changing personal habits, and simply making better, healthier choices every single day. Right? Yeah, and we'll see how this holds up at the dinner after church today.

Or get rich quick schemes, which frankly should be called get poor quick schemes. See, no matter what kind of day dreams we have, fact is there are still no substitutes for hard work and thrifty, frugal living. Do without a few things, save for a rainy day, and for heaven's sake get that credit card balance paid off. Tear up your credit cards if you have to. We know this—but did you know the average American has thousands and thousands of dollars worth of credit card debt?

And, that we just keep adding more? There are no shortcuts to financial stability, even though we, keep trying to find them.

Athletes on steroids. Students cheating on their homework. Adults, cheating on their taxes. And a national political campaign where candidates of both parties find that the quickest way to *lose* a race, is to actually tell us about the hard choices we have to make. Better to promise the quick fix, better to tell us we can have our cake and eat it too. Better not tell any of us here, about sacrifices in living standards we might actually have to make. At least, not if you want to get elected.

But, again, there are no shortcuts in life. And there are certainly no shortcuts in our relationship with God, if you want what God has. If you desire life full and free and forever in the Kingdom of our Father. Then says Jesus Christ there is no other way but to pick up your cross and follow me. I am the gate, He says this week. Any other way you try to get in, you're a thief and a bandit. "I am the way the truth and the life," He will say in the Gospel lesson next week. "No one comes to the Father except by me." There is just no other way to be saved, then to follow of Jesus Christ, and to walk the way of His cross.

And we know that. Nothing here you haven't heard before, standard issue Lutheran sermon here, Jesus is the way and there is no other. I could say Amen right now and we could all go home except for one small problem. There are no shortcuts in our life of faith—but we keep looking for shortcuts anyway. We keep looking for the easy way out.

We want our sins forgiven us, for example. Jesus came to earth to forgive me, He died to forgive me, it's like somehow it's now become God's job to forgive me, whenever I do something dopey. All I have to do is stand here and read page 56 in the green hymnal once in a while, and there you are, right? But that's trying to take a shortcut. Just standing here, saying the words on Sunday, that's trying to take a shortcut, what about actually apologizing to the people you've hurt? What about actually repenting of your sins, which means admitting that this particular bad habit whatever it is has gone on long enough—and it's time for God to make a

change in your life. What about admitting that you yourself are the source of most all your problems in life, and that instead of quietly confessing a slip up here or there the only real option is to surrender total control of your life, to God? Well, that's a little harder—yeah, it's harder—but it's the only way. There are no shortcuts to a life of faith.

Or this world of ours, a million different problems threatening to swallow us up, from the war to the economy to the environment. Don't we wish we had a better world. Don't we wish that were some new technology, some new breakthrough, that would solve the world's problems while allowing us to continue living our same old careless, self-centered lives. Dream on. You really want a better world? Really? Then give God the chance to make you a better person. Give God free rein to make you over in His image and likeness, it really does begin in here, in you. And there really is no other way.

For us as Christians, there simply are no shortcuts. You don't get the empty tomb, until you go through the cross, that's it. But the great good news of the Gospel is, that Jesus Christ went that way first. He took no shortcuts, but carried His cross all the way to the bitter end. He died, for you, and went to the grave. He then rose again, and is here with you now to walk all the way by your side. There are shortcuts, but there's nothing to fear either, because you are in the company of the one who went the distance, and who came out on top—Jesus Christ our Lord. And He promises to shepherd you through this world, all the way, to a Kingdom yet to come. May His great day come quickly, and may we be found faithful when it does, in the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.