

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on John 10:1-10 on May 11, 2014 at Victory of the Lamb.

**Series: Stonework**  
**Today's Focus: Touchstone**

**“Avoid Spiritual Scams by Staying Close to the Good Shepherd”**

In the name of Jesus Christ who said, “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.”

Have you ever sold anything on Craigslist? It's an amazing way to sell almost anything for free, but it's like navigating in a jungle sometimes, isn't it? Last week we finally sold the motorized lift chair that we got for my Mother-in-Law when she was losing her mobility due to brain cancer. Today is a little hard because this is the first Mother's Day that Mom isn't with us. I'd be lying if I said we didn't feel kind of sad about that. But we're also happy that because Jesus lives she is with him and all believers now in paradise. And because we know that she's in heaven now where one day she will receive her glorified body, she doesn't have need for this chair here on earth anymore.

So we listed it on Craigslist. But over the first two weeks it was listed, a couple times I was contacted by people who were pretty obviously trying to scam me. I was getting frustrated at just how blatant some of these scam attempts were.

So when someone finally agreed to come over to buy the chair and they handed me a wad of cash, the first thing I did was hold each of those \$20 bills up to the sky. You know why, right? I wanted to make sure they each had that magnetic strip that indicates they're legit and not counterfeit. It's amazing how much technology is involved in the printing of our money to keep up with scammers who would deceive people using counterfeit cash. The buyer acted a little surprised I would do that but hopefully he knew that if he was an honest person then he had nothing to worry about. And, thank God, everything checked out. I'm a trusting person, but you have to be careful because that's the world we in, isn't it? It's full of scams.

Well you know what one of the biggest scams out there is? It's a scam the devil has been using and adapting in the world for a very long time. It's to get people to think that what scammers try and do out there in the world on Craigslist, couldn't also happen in the church. And I'm not just talking about in the realm of money matters, but in the realm of faith and spiritual matters. Because if there's a financial scam where some church leader gets caught stealing money, well that's of course very bad. But if there's a spiritual scam where some church leaders get away with corrupting people's souls, that's potentially far worse. Yet the devil's gotten very adept at adapting his spiritual scams over the years.

Think back to the beginning of the Reformation for example. Europe in the early 1500s AD. Germany. Martin Luther had to leave the church of his day because the church leaders were spiritually scamming the people. They were using a spiritual sounding message about a made up place called purgatory to manipulate people using fear as a motivator. People were manipulated with fear into buying little pieces of paper called indulgences to fund the basilica. And so basically you had church leaders scamming the common people by making them think that you could somehow buy the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven apart from faith in Jesus Christ alone. Yikes, huh!? Now maybe that doesn't seem that very subtle, but the devil keeps adapting his scamming efforts just as he has from the beginning.

In the infant years of the early Christian church, the Apostle Paul gave these farewell words to church leaders in Ephesus. He said, <sup>28</sup> *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.* <sup>29</sup> *I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.* <sup>30</sup> *Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.* <sup>31</sup> *So be on your guard!*

Paul tells the early Christian church that savage wolves will come in among them. Yikes! Some of them would even arise up from within the church. Spiritual thieves. Spiritual scammers who would distort the truth and draw people away from Jesus. So in our sermon text from John 10 today, Jesus begins by saying, *“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.”*

It’s interesting who Jesus is talking to here, the Pharisees, because these Pharisees were people inside the church. In Jesus’ day the Pharisees were spiritual leaders, the ultimate insiders. But in John chapter 10 he’s calling them out as thieves and robbers. Spiritual scammers who should have been spiritual shepherds. But you see right here how the devil has been adapting his spiritual scams from the beginning. So even in modern times we are not exempt from this. We live in a world where there are more voices than ever before all competing for our attention, our likes in Facebook, our follows, our views, our time, our money, our devotion.

So how are we to detect who are the thieves and robbers today, the spiritual scammers, and who are the true shepherds? How can we avoid the spiritual scams that are out there?

Well here’s the big idea today as we continue this Stonework series. **Jesus wants to help you avoid spiritual scams by staying close to him. He is our touchstone.** The idea of a touchstone comes from ancient Greece where a touchstone was used to verify if gold coins were legitimate. You would take the gold and scrape it on the touchstone. Because of the properties of this stone the line would be a certain color. The touchstone would tell you how pure the gold was. And that’s what Jesus is trying to help you do today. **Avoid spiritual scams by staying close to him. He is our touchstone.**

That means before we can test the teachings of others we need to know Jesus really well and why we would want to stay close to him. So what do we learn? <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 listen to 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 on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.* One of the things Jesus wants us to know about him in John chapter 10 is that he alone is the truly good shepherd. He has no ulterior motives. He calls out to his sheep, they listen to his voice, and they follow him. They know he calls to them with love. His voice is a voice of love. That is why his sheep listen to him. They follow him because they know he loves them and he’s going to protect them and he’s going to lead them to green pastures.

Today we are celebrating Mother’s day. And we should celebrate because for most of us our mother was the first picture of love in our lives. She carried us in her womb. She rocked us to sleep even when she had been up all night and perhaps migraines were pounding. She nursed us when we were hungry. She comforted us when we got all worked up or scared. She took care of us when we were sick. She put our needs ahead of her own. And because of her love, it’s amazing how even babies can recognize the voice of

their mothers. One of the things that I have loved most about being a dad is to see the faces of our girls light up when they see their mother smile at them, or to hear them coo as she comes into the room.

Well that picture isn't all that different from what Jesus is saying in the case of a Christian. You know Jesus' voice because he has spoken of his love for you in the Scriptures. You know that he is the Good Shepherd who loved you so much that he died on the cross in your place to take your sins away. You know that he defeated death and the devil for you when he rose from the dead. And so you listen to him.

You know he'll never abuse you. He'll never manipulate you. He'll never ridicule you or call you names. Rather he calls you by name. He treats you like his dearly loved child.

So when I say that the touchstone of our faith is Jesus, one reason I say this is because of the love that Jesus has shown. So you must hold me accountable to this as a pastor, a spiritual shepherd under Christ. Jesus said, <sup>5</sup>*But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.* <sup>6</sup>*Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.*

So if you listen to my sermons and you attend my Bible studies and you meet with me over a cup of coffee for counseling and you don't hear through me the voice of Jesus your loving shepherd calling out to you...Jesus says, Run. Run away from a spiritual scam. And this isn't just regarding me, but if anyone uses God's Word to harm you, to ridicule you, to manipulate you, or to abuse you, you run from them. You don't listen to them. You don't follow them. You don't support them. That is not the voice of your loving shepherd.

So the touchstone of our faith is the love of Jesus. But we should also just say a little more about what the "love of Jesus" sounds like. <sup>7</sup>*Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.* <sup>8</sup>*All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them.* <sup>9</sup>*I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture.* So Jesus says, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."

This is the love of Jesus: There aren't many gates. There aren't many ways to heaven. There is one way. It is through faith in Jesus. And here's why. Jesus saw your sin. He knows what you have done. You can't hide the reality of your sin from him. The things you have viewed on the internet over the weekend. The grudges that you've nursed over the years. The greed that still causes you to clench your money as if it's your own. He sees and he knows that you cannot stand in the Father's presence on your own.

Yet Jesus, the Good Shepherd, loves you anyway. You see Jesus' love is a very specific love. The Bible says, *"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). He loved you while you were still a sinner. He died for you before you repented. He loved you before you became lovable. And so he says, "Come enter heaven through me. I am the gate. The one and only gate. Only those who enter through me will live." So when we are identifying spiritual scammers we need to see if they hate sin and love Jesus because the love of Jesus is focused on setting us free from sin and leading us safely to heaven.

This is the kind of love that truly sets you free, my friends. You can tell if you are being led by an imposter if you are constantly being chained and tied up but never released. Because that is what a thief does. Jesus

said, <sup>10</sup> *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.* A thief will try to control you by abusing the law to coerce and manipulate you. A thief wants only to take from you. But the love of Jesus is different. He gives. He gives you life, and life to the full. What does this mean? He sets you free from every burden, all guilt, and every kind of fear. He sets you free from the slavery of sin. He leads you in love as he speaks to you through his word so that you grow in faith, so that you can find strength to overcome temptation, so that you can avoid spiritual scams by staying close to him. And when you are free in Christ, close to him through his word, you have life to the full—a life that lasts forever.

Many of you know, this week we buried my dear Grandma Nottling. Actually this Friday morning, two weeks to the day she went to heaven, my Grandpa, her husband of 61 years, also fell asleep in the Lord Jesus and went to heaven. The doctor says he died of a broken heart.

My Grandma told me two years ago when I last saw them in Texas about the day they met. Apparently they were each with a group from their church playing volleyball at Bradford Beach where they first saw each other. They spent the rest of day together there hanging out with their groups of friends. Then later that evening they were alone together out on the pier. So my Grandma is telling me this happy story with a twinkle in her eye when she says to me, “And do you want to know how we spent the rest of that evening out on the pier?” And I’m thinking, “Um...I’m not sure Grandma, but go ahead.” And without missing a beat she says, “We talked about our favorite Bible passages. That’s when I knew we were going to get married.”

Well for over six decades they continued to talk about those favorite Bible passages that they shared. For over six decades they continued to hear sermons based on the Bible at their Lutheran church that they attended together. They delved deeper into those passages in Bible study together. They taught their children those Bible passages. They followed the voice of their Savior. And finally, they fell asleep in their Savior Christ Jesus as they listened one last time at their bedside as their faithful pastor, a shepherd under Christ, reminded them yet again of their Savior’s love.

Friends, I don’t tell this story to make you feel bad if you didn’t grow in up a Christian family with a mom and dad who were married for 61 years. Not at all. But I do want you to think about how you can stay close to Jesus, how you can start helping your family stay close to Jesus, how you can avoid spiritual scams. May all of you always hear the voice of your Savior, Jesus Christ, through his word because he loves you and wants you to be in heaven with him forever. That is only way to avoid spiritual scams. Stay close to Jesus. Stay in his word. He is our touchstone. Amen.

### **My Next Steps**

**Point to Ponder:** Staying close to Jesus through his word is the only way to avoid becoming the victim of a spiritual scam.

**Treasure to Share:** *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand”* (John 10:27-28).

**Action to Take:** We get to know the voice of our Good Shepherd, Jesus, when we spend time daily in his word. Tonight before you go to bed, search the Gospel of John for one verse that speaks to you about how much God loves you. Read it out loud. Write it down. Try and memorize it as you lie in bed letting your mind think about what it means. Then try and recall it first thing Monday morning to start your week following your Savior's voice!