

SERMON

John 10:1-10

'Jesus the gate'

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TEXT

'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. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. 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. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.'

Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So again Jesus said to them,

'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

INTRODUCTION

I'd like to begin today by drawing your attention back to the stained-glass window in this church which I talked about with the children.

In the forefront, of course, is that memorable picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep. But look right behind the shepherd and you'll see another feature of this window which also comes from Jesus' teaching. In fact from our text today, I'm talking about the open gate, this is the gate where the shepherd leads the sheep in to be in a safe place over night, and the gate where the shepherd leads the sheep out to that beautiful pasture further in the background.

And in our text today the focus is not in the first place on Jesus as the good shepherd, but on Jesus as the gate. Why does Jesus say this about himself, 'I am the gate'? Well, we'll think about three different aspects of this today – First that Jesus is the gate for his under-shepherds. Second that He's the only gate of salvation. And third that He's the gate to abundant life - even now.

THE GATE FOR THE UNDER-SHEPHERDS

So the first point is that Jesus is the gate for his under-shepherds to approach his sheep, which is to say, that Jesus is the means by which pastors are to relate to the people they serve.

Notice what Jesus says, '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. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.' Now the context here is important. This passage follows on straight on from Jesus big

argument with the Pharisees about healing the boy who was blind on the Sabbath. So Jesus has been, and perhaps still is, talking mostly to the religious leaders. So when Jesus begins talking about those thieves, bandits and strangers as he puts it, who climb in over the wall because they have bad intentions for the sheep, and he compares it to those shepherds who enter properly through the gate and call the sheep by name. It seems that at one level he's making a point of about those who have spiritual oversight for the people of God, the people we call pastors, or ministers or priests, or various other names. The word pastor means shepherd, by the way, Jesus is the Good Shepherd, but his pastors in the church are his under-shepherds.

And so notice, how are the shepherds to approach the sheep? How do pastors relate to their people? Through the gate, that is through Jesus. In other words, a pastor is not to come to his people speaking his own clever ideas in his own power and authority. But a pastor comes to his people speaking the words of Jesus, by the authority of Jesus, in the power of Jesus. Through your pastors, through your shepherds. You are not to hear their individual voice, but the voice of the Good Shepherd.

And on the flipside then, if you come across a pastor or other church leader who draws the focus to himself rather than Christ, Jesus says you don't have to listen, it's a strange voice. And when that happens, the sheep get scattered he says.

In John chapter 21, after Jesus is risen from the dead, Jesus appears to Simon Peter to re-instate him as an apostle and pastor after Peter had denied him. And Jesus asks only one question. Although he asks it three times, 'Simon, do you love me'. And when he says does, Jesus says, then 'feed my lambs, care for my sheep'. In other words, the most important criteria for Peter being re-instated as a pastor in his church, is that he loves Jesus, that his ministry is centred on Christ. Jesus doesn't quiz him on his public speaking abilities or how good he is at running a meeting or making YouTube videos or live-streaming on Facebook, just one question, Simon, do you love me. If you have a pastor that can truly answer yes and live from that, then you've got the most important criteria for being a shepherd of the sheep.

THE ONLY GATE OF SALVATION

So number two then, That Jesus is the gate means he is the only means of salvation. Jesus says, 'I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved...'

We live in a time when we are surrounded by people of many different religions, faiths and worldviews. And this has always been the way really, Christians have in history usually lived in pluralistic societies, Often as a minority. But one thing that people haven't always assumed, but which has now become increasingly popular, is to think that all of these different paths are just equally valid ways to God, the supposed many different pathways up the mountain. But Jesus seems to have a very different idea. 'I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved'. You can't climb in he says, by any other way. Jesus speaks in a similar way just a few chapters on, actually in our Gospel reading for next Sunday, where he says, 'I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except by me' (John 14:6). Despite our modern sensibilities, it's very clear here that Jesus teaches himself as the only path, the only way, the only gate of salvation. And while there is an exclusive claim here, it is at the same time the most inclusive offer imaginable!! Because for Jesus to be the gate of salvation, means that salvation is by grace, it's a gift. Because for Jesus to be the gate means that he himself has opened the way to God. He lays down his life for the sheep, and he takes it up again in his resurrection, so that by faith in him all can receive this precious gift of salvation and

live with him forever! It's exclusively through him and his work for us, but it's inclusively for absolutely everyone, no matter who they are, where they come from, or what their past life has been.

And don't we need to be reminded of this precious truth again and again and again, because sometimes we're tempted to try and enter the sheepfold by another way, like those trying to climb in over the wall. So for example, we can think that the way we can get through the gate to God is by the good things we do, the life we live. Or we might think that our family heritage will be our ticket to take us through that gate. But Jesus is the gate, it's as we are united to Christ through baptism and faith in him, that we are welcomed into the fold, and receive the gift of salvation.

So Jesus is the gate for the shepherds to approach the sheep, pastors and people, He's the gate of salvation, the means by which we receive this gift of eternal life with God.

THE GATE FOR THE SHEEP – ABUNDANT LIFE

And finally, That Jesus is the gate means he's the way we find an abundance of life, even now.

Hear the last verses of this text again, Jesus says: 'I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

Sometimes people have an idea of Christianity that it sucks the fun out of life. People sometimes wrestle with whether or not to become a Christian or stay a Christian or return to the Christian life because they can only see the things they think they'll lose, things they may have to leave behind. People can think that being a Christian makes your world smaller and duller. But hear again this wonderful promise of Jesus, He comes to bring an abundant life, that's what this beautiful picture is about of the sheep going in and out through the gate. They can come in to rest securely and be protected. And they can go out to graze and feed in the pasture, there's life, there's vitality. This is a picture of freedom, of blessedness, of peace, of abundant life, life in all its fullness. Think of all that makes up that fullness of life for you, love and friendship, music and art, the beauty and grandeur of creation, food and drink, joy and peace and freedom. Other ways end up taking that life away, Jesus comes to enrich it all, with him at the centre, leading up, as we listen to his voice. Here's how one commentator described it from this verse: "Jesus calls his followers, not to a dour, lifeless, miserable existence that squashes human potential, but to a rich, full, joyful life, one overflowing with meaningful activities under the personal favour and blessing of God and in continual fellowship with his people."

Now of course the greatest promise of Jesus is that eternal salvation that we've touched on and that he opens up for us, but sometimes we can emphasize that to such an extent, that we don't take seriously how we can begin living in this new life even now. And what can happen then is that we think, sure Jesus is the gate of eternal salvation, but when it comes to getting the most out of life now, I need to look somewhere else. So we might not trust in our own goodness and strength for our salvation, but perhaps we trust in it for getting the most out of life now. We might not trust in our wealth and possessions for eternal life, but perhaps we trust in it for finding happiness in life now.

But Jesus is the gate to the abundant life even now! Follow him, listen to his voice, and let him enrich and fulfill your life now, and into eternity.

CONCLUSION

So next time you see one of those beautiful old paintings of Jesus the Good Shepherd carrying the little lambs in his arms, take a bit of extra time to check whether there's not also a gate somewhere in the picture. And let that be part of your meditation on God's work in your life as well.

Jesus is the gate for pastors and the people of God, the only gate of salvation, and the gate to abundant life even now. God grant it to us for Jesus' sake, Amen.