

St. Luke's Episcopal Church  
Lindale, Texas  
4 Easter  
John 10:1-10 *I am the Gate*  
May 7, 2017  
The Reverend John P. Carr

## *I am the Gate*

*"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*

*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures and leadeth me beside the still waters.*

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you art with me; your rod and thy staff, they comfort me."*<sup>1</sup>

Comforting words aren't they? We know this 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm from our youth, and its words are written on your heart.

These are comfortable words for believers who will follow the shepherd but not very well appreciated by those who do not hear his voice. This is the problem that Jesus is addressing in his image of the sheepfold, the gate, the thief and the bandit, the gatekeeper, the voice and the stranger. Jesus used this form of speech to address the scribes, Pharisees and priests who had just interviewed the man to whom Jesus had just restored his sight. A man blind from birth was given sight by Jesus and instead of believing what was before them the Scribes and Pharisees made every effort to discredit him. They failed.

Jesus paints a picture with words of who the Scribes and Pharisees are in the world. They are the thieves and bandits he refers to who put the sheep at risk. He makes clear to them who they are and they do not like it. The metaphor of the sheepfold that he uses is one that all the common people will understand much better than the leadership of the Temple. In his reference to the thieves and bandits Jesus is making a clear reference to those who had just had the blind man put before them. The blind man is not treated as Exhibit "A" that Jesus is a healer and the Messiah. Instead, the man is grilled by the Pharisees! Because he has not buckled under their pressure and resisted their threats and persuasions,

he is identified in the metaphor as a sheep who did not trust the voice of one with the voice of a stranger. They are the thieves, bandits and strangers.

Augustine<sup>2</sup> suggested that the Gatekeeper who opens the gate for the shepherd and the sheep is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who will guide us into the way of all Truth. *Who is the Truth but Christ?* He asked. The Holy Spirit is the one who guides all Truth. The Gatekeeper makes clear the way of Jesus by using Him, the Gate, to move His sheep into the sheepfold, and when the shepherd leaves the sheepfold His sheep follow Him because they know His Voice.

This really happens. In an account from the first decade of the last century, a man named C.T. Wilson told a personal story about his time in the Holy Land. He was experiencing the life of the people of the land and had joined a group of shepherds. At night they would pitch their tents in a circle and have the sheep in the center of the ring of tents. Six or seven flocks were inside the ring of tents for the night. There they were safe from predators or those who would steal the sheep. In the morning each of the shepherds walked outside the circle of tents and began calling his special call to his sheep. In moments the sheep had all self-sorted themselves and the multiple flocks were all with their shepherd and heading away from camp. In five minutes the camp was empty. The sheep knew the voice of their shepherd and followed him.

Jesus identifies Himself as the Gate. He is the way into and out of the sheepfold. None come into the sheepfold except through the Gate. This Gate is the way to the Father. This brings to mind John 14:6 where Jesus was addressing Thomas and told him, *"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* This is how a gate operates. It allows some to pass and keeps others outside. Jesus as the Gate was keeping the robbers and thieves away from His flock. He was leading them away from the teaching of the Pharisees. The Pharisees had been given the chance with the blind man to see that Jesus was the Messiah but instead of "seeing" they accused the blind man and Jesus of fraud by evil spirits.

Once the sheep respond to the voice of the shepherd and pass through the Gate into the Sheepfold, they are allowed to go out and follow the voice of their Shepherd and in fact come and go to their good pasture with Him in freedom.

The image of the sheep who have come in and are led out again, Augustine believed, referred to the forgiveness of Christ for those who believe in Him. They are given free forgiveness, protection and the opportunity to live life abundantly.

Today we have the voices of many strangers calling to us from outside the sheepfold. These voices lure us into places we should not go. Satan waits outside the door. He wants to *“steal, kill and destroy”* those who have heard the voice of their shepherd and responded to Him. Satan does not want anyone passing through the Gate to the Father and the safety of his salvation.

The voices of strangers are calling to us in the media, our communications, some of our associates, some of our activities and some of our leadership. We are surrounded by these voices in the secular world. Because we live in the world and leave the sheepfold to engage the world, we must be well guided and heed the Voice of the Shepherd. If we are to be the hands of Christ the world, we cannot do that on our own. We need direction from the Shepherd.

He is calling us to salvation through Him, the Gate of Heaven. Clement of Alexandria said, *“For I am,” Jesus says, “the gate,” which we who desire to understand God must discover, that He may throw heaven’s gates wide open to us. For the gates of the Word being intellectual, are opened by the key of faith. No one knows God but the Son, and one to whom the Son shall reveal Him.”*

With Jesus we have the invitation to everlasting life and He will lead us there. He will lead us through Baptism and in the breaking of the bread that reveal His love and care for us. He promises us to give us life and to have it abundantly. Why else would He have promised this Good Pasture for us? The alternative is death, He wants to give us life.

So what are we to do?

We need to listen to the one who said "*I am the Gate.*"

We need His guidance to enable us to hear the right voice and ignore or avoid the wrong voice. We discover His guidance,.. His open Gate,.. in His Word, His Church and in His Voice in Prayer, *when we pray and listen.*

He is standing there with the Gate open inviting us in.

We just need to listen to His Voice and follow.

Amen

1. The 23rd Psalm KJV p. 476 BCP

2. Jesus' True Gate Sermonette, "*The Gospel of John, A Commentary,*" Frederick Dale Bruner, p 605-621

Num. 27:16, Ezekiel 34:1-16, Ps. 23, 78.52, 95.7; Isaiah 40:10-11, Mk 4:33-34; 16.25,29.