

John 10:1-10
Fourth Sunday of Easter
'I am the gate...'

Sermon for Bethlehem Lutheran Church Morley by Rev. M P Bishop

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Today I am proclaiming the word of God to you from John 10:1-10.

Verse 9 summarises it beautifully:

[Jesus said to the Pharisees] *"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture."* (John 10:9, NIV)

Let's pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O lord, our rock, our redeemer, our gate.

'I am the gate!' (John 10:7,9)

It's probably Jesus' least well known 'I am sayings'.

It doesn't have the same majesty to it as 'I am the light of the world' (John 8:12).

Nor the same promise of satisfaction as 'I am the bread of the life' (John 5:35). Or the immediate comfort of 'I am the Good Shepherd' – which comes up later in this chapter (John 10:11,14).

You can't be illuminated, fed or comforted by a gate!¹

Yet Jesus wants us to focus on him being the gate just as much as any of the other things he says he is.

After all he has just come from an encounter where he displayed the way he brings people into good pastures but was rejected as being of any insignificance.

He healed a blind man.

The Pharisees took exception to that being one on the Sabbath.

He now tells them you better understand that I am the gate.

We better focus on that too!¹ (see endnote)

We tend to focus a lot on the Good Shepherd.

The thing is though, you can't trust THE Good shepherd if you haven't first entered the sheep pen by the Gate.

¹For completeness the other 'I am' sayings are vine (John 15:5), resurrection and the life (John 11:25) and the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).

Verses 1-3 of chapter 10 show us how first knowing the gate then leads us to the Good shepherd.

Verse 1-3 are essentially a parable.

They say:

“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.” (John 10:1, NIV)

“The one who enters by the gate is a shepherd of the sheep.” (John 10:2, NIV and Bruner p605)

“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.” (John 10:3, NIV)

What’s imagined here is a sheepfold built of stones and timber.

There is only one legitimate way in and out of the sheep pen – through the gate of course.

A few thorny briars on top try to keep thieves out and reinforce there is only one proper way in.

The sheepfold is the people of God.

Jesus is saying that if you want to come into the people of God you need to come in through him.

He is the gate through which you come into the people of God.

There is no other way.

In concrete terms what going through the gate means is simply trust who he is.

Than live your life like you do.

Trust what **he has already done** for you – his teaching, life, death and resurrection and ascension.

Trust **what he keeps** doing – growing us on his vine, giving us the bread of life and leading us to green pastures.

Trust what he **will do** for you – he will come again to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

Lastly, trusting in him means that we recognize that **any other message is not a gate**.

Instead, it's a robber or a thief.

I’ll give you some examples of the other messages because they are big part of seeing why Jesus told us about being our gate.

So, for example, going back to Jesus’ day, the Pharisees were obsessed with devotion to the rules as a way of winning God’s favour.

Hence no serious God lover would heal on the Sabbath when God said you had to rest that day.

That was the account in the verses before our text today.

They Pharisees thieved by branding Jesus a sinner (John 9:24) thereby stealing his honour.

They robbed the healed man by kicking him out of their fellowship.

In other words, by robbing Christ's honour and hurting the needy.

At the time of the reformation the church robbed God's honour by making stuff up about works humans can do to get to heaven.

They also split the people in the sheep pen into various classes – the elite like the priests and monks who were definitely in, and the rest who well, couldn't be sure.

The reformers shone the light back on the work of Christ and showed how he was a **gracious** gate for everyone and you really could be sure of being in.

In today's world an example of the thieves and robbers is whoever takes the focus off Christ.

The prosperity gospel is one example – the simplistic lie that “God wants you to be rich and happy in this life, and unless you are you have somehow failed to love God enough and he is punishing you for your lack of faith”.

You also see that applied to healing – especially relevant at the moment with COVID-19 and some of the stuff going around in some US 'Christian' religious circles by vision casters and lead pastors of extreme Pentecostal ministries (called the New Apostolic Reformation – don't be too impressed by this made up and self-given title).

I find it interesting that at the beginning of the Coronavirus outbreak they claimed to have authority over it and that they could control its spread.

It's since taken more than 63,019 lives in the US and infected over 1 million people there as of yesterday (Sat 2 May 2020).

Moving on, today there are also those who try to tell us the real meaning of the Scripture is a special cause.

Like the environment.

Or world poverty.

Those things are important – but they are not the gate.

They belong to our life in response to knowing Christ, not the way we get to know him.

Why this matters is because what's at stake.

In all these examples it worth remembering what the thief and robber does.

The best way to see what's at stake is to contrast with what a shepherd going through the gate does.

We are told in verse 9 that

"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture." (John 10:9, NIV)

To break that down:

Being saved is being kept completely safe.

In 'God terms' it is full reconciliation with God.

Think of it as life with God – our vertical realm.

'Coming in' and 'going out' is a Hebrew expression that expresses a freedom in human life.

Because we have God's safety we have a freedom not to be bound by the things of this world or trapped in what would destroy.

See that as the horizontal realm of life.

And pasture means satisfaction.

So it covers both the vertical and horizontals of life.

The thief or the robber wants to steal you from ALL this.

Simple as that!

They want to take you over to another place.

A place where you don't have reconciliation with God, the freedom of life under his security and the promise of pasture that sums it all up.

What we therefore do is stay focused on the gate.

And it's a call for all of us.

That's because in verse 2 something **VERY** interesting happens.

In number of Bible translations – likely the one in front of you - it says the one who enters by the gate is 'the' shepherd of the sheep.

In the Greek technically it's not 'the shepherd' – the 'the' is missing.

It should really be 'the one who enters by the gate is **a** shepherd of the sheep'.

Jesus is not here the shepherd.

Remember that he identifies firstly as the gate.

Only later in verse 11 and verse 14 is a shepherd – indeed the Good Shepherd.

A shepherd to the shepherds entering through him the Gate.

This matters because it is telling the many of us in the shepherding business how we faithfully look after the sheep in our care.

So thinking through who is in this shepherding business: The blind man of the previous chapter who was healed was a shepherd in the way he stoically kept pointing to Jesus and believing in him.

My sister who teaches Christian Studies at a Lutheran High School is a shepherd in the way she consistently points to Christ and his work.

So are parents and grandparents that tell their children and grandchildren what Christ has done for them and keep it simple.

So is a colleague in the work place who doesn't try to dispel Christianity into a religion of good works when asked.

It might be more socially palatable.

But the true saving truth really is that Christ died for our sins because we are sinners.

And also that Christ took up his life again to show that his sacrifice was sufficient and his new life would be shared with us.

In one way or another each of us is a shepherd with those we witness to starting with your own families.

Keep the gate Christ central in your shepherding.

Last thing – don't forget the gatekeeper.

“The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. [‘A shepherd of Christ’] calls [their] own sheep by name and leads them out.”
(John 10:3, NIV)

The Holy Spirit is the gatekeeper.

I'll have more on the Spirit next week when I preach on 2 Corinthians chapter 2.

But pray for the Spirit's gateopening in your life that your will keep your message focused on the gate – our Lord Jesus Christ.

The gate might not be the most popular or flashy 'I am' saying of Jesus.

Yet it's the one that gets you into the people of God.

And it's the one we pass through each day as we go into the world in our vocations as carers, parents, students, pastors, workers, friends and children.

As shepherds following THE Good Shepherd.

Christ has, does and will keep serving you as the gate to life with God.

He will keep you safe and keep you in the freedom that he offers.

Only he can do it, for the thief comes to steal, kill and destroy, but Jesus has come that you may have life, and have it abundantly.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit +. Amen.

ⁱ We see the need to focus on Jesus as the gate from the original setting of this text. The background for today's Gospel reading is the prior chapter.

I suggest a very helpful thing for you to do is get out your Bible today and read both John 9 and 10 together.

But briefly, in chapter 9 Jesus heals a blind man.
The healed man shows he understands Jesus is the gate by doing what he says, believing him, witnessing about him and worshipping him.
The Pharisees show they do not understand Jesus is the gate.
They steal Jesus' honour and thieve the man's joy by kicking him out.
They think there is another way to God by insisting it's wrong to heal on the Sabbath.
But they are blind to the fact that the Sabbath is not there for its own sake, but to honour God... and here God stands in front of them and they are blind to that.

Therefore Jesus points out they are blind.
They need to see him for what he is.
He then launches into the parable about the gate (John 10:1-10)
And after that, the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-21).

[Thanks to F Dale Bruner's Gospel of John commentary for helping me through this text.](#)