

**“ I Am the Gate”**  
(John 10:1-10, Acts 2:42-47)

4-30-23  
Rev. J. Koyama

This morning is “Good Shepherd Sunday.” The Good Shepherd passage is long, so we break it into three parts and you heard the first part this morning. There is a lot going on in the passage, in a mixed together kind of way, that gives you the basic idea, but is not clear exactly what is being said. While Jesus does talk about a shepherd for the sheep, his main focus in this first part is really on getting us to think of him as a gate for the sheep. So it might be more accurate to call this “Gate” Sunday.

Jesus is describing himself as the gate to the fold. He is an entrance in which, by both coming in and going out, we become the sheep of his “pasture.” And pasture here, as in Psalm 23, means an abundant life.

The message is that those who hear and follow the voice of the one they recognize and trust as the voice of their Shepherd, enter into a reality which is not dominated by wolves or the various predators that lie in wait for their victims out in the wilds. They enter into green pastures, still waters, a joyful peace, in which they experience gratitude for a cup overflowing.

All of this is expressed in imagery and lush poetry, in the Gospel reading and Psalm 23, but our reading from Acts spells it out for us in plain language. This world into which Jesus is the gate is nothing other than life in Christian community at its finest, where “all are together sharing generously with each other and with anyone in need, and all are breaking bread and praying together with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having good will for all people”.

And not only is this the experience within the fold. But members are able to carry this experience with them as they go out of the fold, out those doors (*point*), into the community to share their experience with others. They go out with confidence, because the Good Shepherd goes out with them, just as he has led them in. (*do hand gesture: here is the church, here is the steeple, open the doors see all the people*). Don't you love the inviting feeling and energy that beckons to us from that doorway?

And Jesus's reference to his followers as “sheep” of his fold is also important. It is an intentionally unflattering description. Sheep are skittish creatures. They are easily frightened and they easily fall into a herd mentality. They can run around as though they are stuck together, which makes it very hard to single one out, to help it. They fearfully

resist a helping hand. They seem reluctant to understand that they are wholly dependent on the security that the Shepherd provides.

It is a description of ourselves that forces us to admit our own shortcomings. But if we understand it rightly, it is also a source of great relief, because it means that we don't have to meet some standard of perfection in order to enter and be a part of it. We only have to be willing to trust in the guidance of the Good Shepherd in order to enter into this "good life".

Imperfect as we are, we the church members are the caretakers of this vision of the good life. It is our privilege to enjoy this blessed life and to share it with others, by welcoming the stranger and extending our hospitality; by showing others that we sincerely care for their safety and wellbeing.

There are many people in this world who do not feel that they are being cared for at all, who have been bullied and teased, threatened or misused in one way or another. And who don't feel that they are experiencing that blessing. They feel themselves to be drowning in a world of wolves, who are sucking them into a world of hatred, anger and resentment.

There are also many who are struggling with feelings of awkwardness, of feeling somehow unacceptable, deeply lonely and unloved. There are people who are carrying feelings of guilt, or grief and loss, fear and confusion, and people who are struggling with their own demons. At one time or another, any one of these people was also you and me.

They need a place where they can be heard and loved and not judged, a place separate from the voices that would belittle or control them. They need a place where they and all of us together can listen together and respond to that one true voice; the voice of the one who knows who we truly are and who truly understands and loves us; the one who frees us to grow and thrive and enjoy and share in all the abundance that he provides. We all need that place. And we are bold to say that this is that place for us. This is our fold in this world.

The church has never been perfect. Even within the New Testament, there are reports of squabbles and division. But none of this negates the fact that there truly is a place of perfect peace and abundance in the heart of Jesus, that is available to us all. That peace that Jesus speaks to our heart has amazing power to transform our lives. And we can experience it, because it is always here for us, in this community

that is dedicated to the hearing of his voice. All we need is hearts that are genuinely open to his guidance, to enter into that life.

I may be old fashioned and a little bit simple minded. But when I hear people talking about everything that's wrong with the world, I feel that we have an answer here. We have a gateway into a new life that changes everything; that can turn every desert into a green pasture. And that gate for us is the voice of Jesus Christ.

So when you walk in that door (point), any door, say to yourself, "You are the door Jesus, and I'm coming in." I'm leaving my deserts behind and entering your green pasture. And when you go out of this church, say to yourself, "I'm not afraid, because you are with me and greener pastures are still ahead."