

Order of Worship
Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 3, 2020

(Read the prayers and scripture readings and recite the Creed aloud, even if you are by yourself, in order to hear with the ears each one. Sing or read the final hymn aloud.)

Prepare for worship: Sit in silence or with soft music for a few moments

Call to Worship:

Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
Till all the world adore his sacred name.

Opening Prayer:

Almighty God, through your only Son you overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. Grant that we who celebrate our Lord's resurrection, by the renewing of your Spirit, arise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Affirmation of Faith Apostle's Creed

Prayer:

Christ, our shepherd and gate, we would rather chart our own course, than to be shepherded like sheep. We would rather find our own way than to see you as the Way. We would rather be shepherds than sheep, who are vulnerable and exposed. Forgive us when we bleat out our resistance, as you guide us to higher pastures. Be our gate, our way to safe havens, where we can dwell with you secure, In the name of Christ the gate who taught us to pray.

The Lord's Prayer

Prayer of Illumination:

Open our ears that we may hear and our hearts and minds that we may receive your word
O Lord our rock and redeemer.

(After each reading take two to three minutes to reflect upon the meaning of the passage to you today.)

New Testament Reading	Acts 2:42-47
Psalm 23	
Epistle Reading	1 Peter 2:19-25
Special Music	Bentz Kirby
Gospel Reading	John 10:1-10
Sermon	Jesus, the Gate

Hymn *Savior like a Shepherd Lead Us* (UMH 381)

1. Savior, like a shepherd lead us,
much we need thy tender care;
in thy pleasant pastures feed us,
for our use thy folds prepare.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
Thou hast bought us, thine we are.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
Thou hast bought us, thine we are.

2. We are thine, thou dost befriend us,
be the guardian of our way;
keep thy flock, from sin defend us,
seek us when we go astray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
Hear, O hear us when we pray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
Hear, O hear us when we pray.

3. Thou hast promised to receive us,
poor and sinful though we be;
thou hast mercy to relieve us,
grace to cleanse and power to free.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
We will early turn to thee.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
We will early turn to thee.

4. Early let us seek thy favor,
early let us do thy will;
blessed Lord and only Savior,
with thy love our bosoms fill.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
Thou hast loved us, love us still.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
Thou hast loved us, love us still.

Benediction:

We have entered into eternal life through Jesus our gate. Go forth following the
guide of the good shepherd who knows us by name and leads us to life Amen

Response: *God Be With You till We Meet Again*

God be with you till we meet again;
by his counsels guide, uphold you,
with his sheep securely fold you;
God be with you till we meet again.

Jesus, the Gate

May 3, 2020

John 10: 1-10

The image that is most familiar from this chapter of John is that of the Shepherd. That image is probably the most endearing and enduring image of Jesus. We all love the paintings of Jesus as the shepherd carrying the lost lamb on his shoulders. We often think of ourselves as the lost lamb that Jesus is carrying back to the sheepfold.

But our passage today, which begins what is often referred to as the shepherd discourse, does not mention Jesus as being the shepherd. In this passage Jesus is not the shepherd but the gate. Jesus is the gate of the sheepfold.

But what does this mean, Jesus is the gate? On the surface it may seem fairly simple. In order to get into heaven, you have to have Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Just believe in Jesus and he will open the gates of paradise for you. Praise the Lord! Halleluah!

Just believe in Jesus. Go to church on Sunday. Read the Upper Room and say a little prayer daily, and the Shepherd will call you. We call ourselves Christians, followers of Jesus, so we must belong to the flock of Jesus.

Ah. But Jesus being the gatekeeper is much more than just opening the pearly gates of heaven. In fact, Jesus as the gatekeeper has nothing to do with opening the gates of heaven.

This passage follows the healing of the man blind from birth and should be read as a continuation of that story. Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees who drove the blind man from them. Now if you remember, that story began with the disciples asking Jesus if the man was blind because of his sin or his parent's sin. The prevailing belief was that infirmities and calamities were caused by one's sin. One who was righteous received blessings. Not that much different from the thinking and "theology" of some today.

But Jesus' response was that the man's blindness had nothing to do with sin but that God's work might be revealed in him. Jesus is the revelation of God's work to restore and save the world. The man born blind could see God's work revealed through Jesus as Jesus healed him, while the Pharisees did not see that as God's work since Jesus healed on the Sabbath, breaking God's law.

So, Jesus as the gatekeeper means that it is through Jesus that God's work of salvation is revealed to the sheep and the sheep enter into relationship with the shepherd. By revealing God's work to save and restore creation, Jesus opens the gate for the shepherd. The shepherd then calls his sheep by name and they come and follow.

Notice that the sheep follow the shepherd because they know the voice of the shepherd and the shepherd knows each sheep by name. This implies a close relationship between the sheep and the shepherd. They know each other. The sheep and the shepherd have an abiding relationship that has been developed as the shepherd protects and nourishes the sheep, leading them to green pastures, and the sheep then trusts and has confidence in the shepherd. Through Jesus as the gatekeeper the shepherd is admitted into the sheepfold and the shepherd calls the sheep. Jesus the gatekeeper reveals the shepherd to the sheep.

Thus, Jesus reveals to us the shepherd. Jesus reveals to us God. Jesus reveals to us the true nature of God, which is love. Jesus reveals this through his teaching. His final command to the disciples is to "love one another as I have loved you". He reveals God's love through his glorification, that is his passion, death and resurrection. He reveals God's love by becoming a servant and washing the disciples' feet. He reveals God's love by laying aside his life for the sake of the world. He reveals God's love as he came so we may have life, abundant life, eternal life in relationship with the shepherd, in relationship with God. Jesus is the gate through which we come into relationship with God by his revelation of God's love for us and all creation.

Now there is a tendency to read this passage as being exclusive. Jesus is the gate so if you don't believe in Jesus you are not in the fold of God. You only get in unless you are a Christian and some would say only their brand of Christianity. But as we read this passage closely, we see that as the gate opens to the shepherd to allow the shepherd in, the shepherd calls the sheep by name and the sheep respond by following when the shepherd calls them. It is the sheep that respond to God's call as revealed through Jesus that are saved and find pasture, that is abundant life. It is not what the sheep call themselves- Christian, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or whatever- but that they respond to God's call to follow the divine shepherd regardless of their "religion". Whoever responds to the call of the divine shepherd, following the divine shepherd and the shepherd's command to love one another, will be let out of the fold by the gate to follow the shepherd to green pastures.

It is not by what we call ourselves that we will be led by the divine shepherd to green pastures, abundant life, but that we respond when the shepherd calls us by name and follow the shepherd.

Reading this passage as a continuation of chapter 9, the thieves and bandits that Jesus is referring to are the Pharisees who drove the blind man from them. These Pharisees were those who maintained salvation through strict adherence to the written law. They cast out those who did not follow the law such as the blind man who was healed on the Sabbath and therefore broke the law.

They were blind to the revelation of God through Jesus, that salvation is given as one responds and follows the call of the divine shepherd to love one another as God loves us; not by strict adherence to the law (or a particular interpretation of the law).

How can we know if it is the divine shepherd or a thief and bandit that is calling our name? Often a thief or bandit claims to come in the name of the shepherd like the scammers who send a text or email claiming to be a grandchild in trouble and needing money immediately. The thief and bandit seek to deceive and keep us from following the shepherd. The truth is really quite simple. Is the call one to love? To love God, to love neighbor, to love each other, to love all people and include all people. If so then it is from the divine shepherd. But if there is even an inkling of hate, of exclusion, of self-centeredness, then it is a thief or bandit and we should run from its call.

Jesus, as the gate, opens by revealing the divine shepherd who calls the sheep, that is us, by name and remains open for the sheep to respond to the call of the shepherd, whose essence is to give and receive love, so they may be led to green pastures: abundant, eternal life.