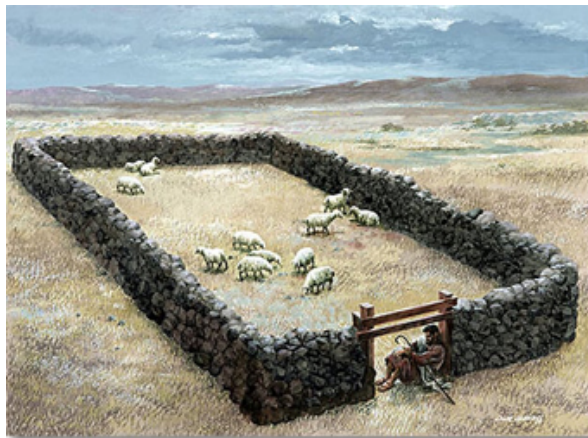


So many metaphors in the gospel this morning – we have sheep, a shepherd, a sheepfold, a gate, a gatekeeper, a pasture and thieves and bandits. And what do you do with metaphors? Well you try to figure out the meaning. So sheep – that’s us. Sheepfold – could be heaven, could be the Christian community, could be the band of the good people? That’s not clear. Shepherd – I usually go with Jesus. Gate – now it is getting confusing but in the second part of the gospel Jesus says he is the gate. Maybe he is the shepherd in the first part and the gate in the second? Gatekeeper? Thieves and bandits? Lots of choices there. I am grateful that the gospel mentions that those listening did not understand. You can see how one would get bogged down with these metaphors.

The other danger is that these metaphors can paint a certain picture in our minds. I know when I saw this picture (show picture) with Jesus sitting at the gate of a sheepfold, I felt a certain sense of comfort. I am pretty sure I saw a similar one as a child. Jesus a shepherd keeping us safe in our sheepfold keeping out all the dangers and anyone who might want to hurt us.



While this is a very comforting picture, it is one that I know also brings a temptation to keep certain people out and others in.

Debie Thomas from Journey with Jesus <sup>1</sup>offers that rather than trying to confuse us with metaphors or set up an “we are in and you are out” situation that this passage “is meant to reveal Jesus to us.” She also offers that while we often see a gate as something to keep people out, it is also a way in. And that image I really liked because if there is anything we know about Jesus, he was about inviting people in.

Think about a long fence or a wall. Without a gate or an opening, it is hard to get to the other side. When was in Israel, we saw lots of security walls which Israel has erected for protection against the Palestinians. You see one of these walls in the picture. I took this picture because our guide told us about a door (circled in yellow) in the wall. You see the wall stopped a man who lived on one side of the wall from getting to his land on the other side and for awhile he had the key to that door and could get to his land. The impression I got was that he no longer had it, but that door made him getting through possible.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2626-i-am-the-gate>



Gates make it possible for us to get in. They can keep us out, but they are an opening – they make a way in what would otherwise be a complete barrier.

Think about the stories of Jesus that you have heard. Think about how he made a way in for those he encountered. Right before this passage is the story of the man who was born blind who had begged all his life to make a living. Jesus makes a way for him by restoring his sight and he comes to believe in Jesus. The woman at the well who comes at noon because she is ostracized receives the living water of Jesus and shares it with her villagers. Jesus made a way for her as well. Jesus is the gate that swings open inviting us in to have life and have it abundantly, to set us free from pain, fear, addition, hurt and all that comes at us in this life.

These days we may feel anything but set free with most of us staying home or with those who are going out to work being very careful with protective gear and staying away from others. I know when I walk my dogs I do something I was taught not to do which is when someone else is approaching on the sidewalk, I move away from them. I have heard that perhaps one way forward in the months to come is for folks to create a bubble – have a group of 10-12 folks that you only interact with and who promise to only interact with you. Talk about the potential to keep others out and visions of high school cliques loom in my head.

While these physical ‘gate closings’ and ‘keeping others away actions’, may be necessary for our safety, I worry that they will also seep into our mindset – how we see and treat others. I worry that they will stop us from seeing how Jesus is swinging the gate open for us. How might Jesus opening the gate to you? How might Jesus be opening a door?



It might be to pray. This quarantine has gone on a long time. Many of us have found ways to manage – routines or practices – some of which are starting to wear thin. Is Jesus calling us to a different prayer practice at this time – holding the gate open to pray as a family at the end of the day or try a meditation practice or journaling?

It might be to listen – to turn off the TV or whatever distraction you turn to and sit down with your spouse or call a friend and ask how they really are doing – listening through the usual – I am fine.

It might be to serve others. Last week, one of our pantry volunteers said her friends asked whether she was still coming to help at our food pantry. Perhaps they heard that Perth Amboy has the highest number of Covid 19 infections in Middlesex County. She said – Of course I am. She is still walking through that gate that Jesus opened for her and is serving. While serving at the pantry is not possible for many of us, think about how else can you serve. You could write a note to someone who is by themselves or not on the internet. Deacon Kathie can give you the addresses of some of our much need for blood at the moment. You could call up the local fire station or police station and see if they would accept cookies or snacks delivered by amazon or a meal. How might Jesus be opening the gate to you in the midst of this pandemic?

I hope that we all take time today to ponder, what gates Jesus is opening and inviting us to come through whether it is in our spiritual life, our relationships, how we serve or in some other way. Jesus is our way our opening into abundant life and he is inviting us in every day.



Amen.