

THE GOOD SHEPHERD
John 10:1-10
Preached by Dr. Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
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This morning's scripture reveals a lot about Jesus' love for us but I'd like to focus on just two things that struck me as I read this passage from John's gospel.

- 1) Jesus is the only gatekeeper into God's Kingdom.
- 2) Jesus desires to seek out what he called "other sheep which are not of this fold until there is one flock and one shepherd.

Let's begin by exploring Jesus' claim "I am the gate."

The Hebrew Scriptures always portrayed the Chosen People consistently being in need of a shepherd to lead them to still waters and green pastures. Then in the New Testament Jesus identified himself as the Good Shepherd willing to lay down his life for his flock. His disciples knew, more than us, that shepherding was a demanding and dangerous job. Shepherds were always on alert for prowling wolves and thieves threatening any lamb that strayed away from the flock. Since most sheep were raised for their wool, shepherds and their sheep, with each other for years, formed mutual attachments. In fact, shepherds considered their sheep as pets, like our dogs and cats, and like us gave their sheep names. The sheep in turn grew to trust their owner's voice, blindly following him wherever he took them.

The saying, "I am the gate," may sound strange to us but the disciples knew just what Jesus was talking about. At night the shepherd would lead his flock into a fenced in enclosure for safe keeping. He would then lay himself down at the fence's opening and literally become a human gate. So when Jesus claimed, "I am the gate," he meant no sheep could get out except over his body. But there's more. Jesus also said, "The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep," promising before any wolf or thief sheep rustler could threaten his flock it would be over his dead body.

Jesus also said, "Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture." One of the recurring phrases in the Old Testament is "going out and coming in." In Psalm 121 it reads, "God will keep him in his going out and his coming in." The Good Shepherd makes sure we can go about our business with absolute certainty that even when we go into the valley of the shadow of death no evil will prevent us from coming out again. The Good Shepherd gives us that peace, because his is the gateway to God's saving presence.

However there is one of the thing we need to remember: Jesus is the gatekeeper not us. That was the Pharisees' first mistake. They reasoned if you weren't an observant Jew meticulously living out the Law of Moses you had no hope for salvation, causing Jesus to warn them, "Judge not lest you be judged." But before we gang up on the Pharisees for being narrow minded let's be honest and admit we can be just as narrow minded in our own peculiar way.

Maybe you've heard the story about St. Peter giving a tour of heaven to the newest arrival. As Peter led the man down a long hallway he would open a door and say, "In here we keep the Catholics," then "This room is for the Baptists," and "In here you'll

see all the Lutherans.” Even before Peter opened each door the man could hear from within joyous laughter and singing.

Finally Peter tiptoed up to the last door. This time the man heard nothing, just silence. Before opening this door, Peter whispered, “Be very quiet, don’t make a sound.” The man looked in and saw very serious people sitting around tables holding committee meetings. After carefully shutting the door, the man asked, “Why are we whispering?” “Because,” Peter replied, “In here we keep the Presbyterians and they think they’re the only ones up here.”

The need to feel superior isn’t exclusive to Christians. Everyone does it. It’s human nature. Secular people, religious people, people of all races and nationalities think their group is the best, so they stick together and become suspicious of everyone else.

Unfortunately, religious differences can lead to religious wars and sadly our history shows “religious” people are capable of doing horrible things in God’s name to other Christians and non-Christians alike.

That’s why we must carefully listen and understand what Jesus meant when saying, “I am the gate for my sheep.” Jesus, no one else, will decide who to call into his flock. He won’t be impressed by denominational branch names, only the sincerity of our hearts. He will judge with justice and love, truth and grace.

What’s more Jesus’ final verdicts just might shock and surprise when he gives free admission to people not on the top of our own list, giving new meaning to his teaching, “The last shall be first and the first shall be last.”

In verse 16 Jesus said something we really need to hear. “I have other sheep that don’t belong to this fold. I must bring them also and they too will listen to my voice.”

Which brings me to my second point: Jesus desires to bring what he called “other sheep which are not of this fold” until there is one flock and one shepherd.

A major stumbling block New Testament believers share with our Old Testament ancestors is the mistaken belief we are both exclusive and privileged. God has singled us out and we are somehow better than everybody else. The sheep outside our fold are really not our concern, because they are not in our special group. So we’ll take care of ourselves, and they can fend for themselves.

Specifically who are these other sheep not of our fold? Those people all around us who don’t recognize the Good Shepherd’s voice. Why don’t they recognize his voice? Maybe because no one has yet shown them how to listen.

Today the prevailing culture has become increasingly secular and post modern people are losing any awareness of what it means to be a member of the beloved community. Now it’s more important than ever God’s people intentionally practice the art of “going out and coming in,” knowing all the while the Good Shepherd’s rod and staff guiding us out into the world and back home again. We need to revisit that image of the Good Shepherd lying down, a human gate, not to lock us into a rigid faith and practice, isolated from the rest of the world, but a gate that lets us come and go. We go out to serve, we come back to be fed and restored by our Good Shepherd.

But consider this: The Good Shepherd calls all disciples to be good shepherds to one another and those sheep not yet in his fold. The mystery that surrounds Christ’s death and resurrection is of God loving his people into being the body of Christ, his eyes and ears, his hands and feet, his heart and mind. It is for this reason we are baptized into

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Christ, so we can be drawn closer to God and simultaneously drawn closer to anyone who needs the protection and nurture of our Good Shepherd.

Be in prayer this week. Ask God to show you the faces of those already around us, right here in our own neighborhood, who need the love and blessings only the Good Shepherd can give. And then ask, "Lord, what do you want me to do about it?"