

## The Shepherd's Gate

King of Glory Lutheran Church  
May 2-3, 2020 Year A: Easter 4 John 10:1-10  
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*Jesus is the gate and the shepherd. He is the One who loves His sheep with all His heart. The gate marks the boundary for what time it is for pasture and what time it is for rest. Today we can't go in or out of our beloved church. But we can continue to listen to the Beloved shepherd. We can be the Church who is pasturing in place and on-line in digital space where more sheep can hear the Shepherd's voice.*

### John 10:1-10

1 "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. 7 So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

I've always remembered this image. A professor drew a box on the chalkboard (parents, you can tell your young people, what a chalkboard is). He drew the box, put a X inside and said this. "If Christianity was a cult it would look like this. You're the X in the middle of the box and there is no way for you to get out."

Then he continued. "But Christianity is like this." He erased a small section of one line and then made a short connecting line pointing out of the box so that it looked like an open gate. Suddenly there wasn't a closed box. It was a fence with a way in and out.

"Christianity is like this." He said. "God never boxes us in. There is always a way in and out. There is always a gate in the fence God has made to protect us. We can come and go and God goes with us whether we're in or out. Christianity is not a cult." I want you to remember that image.

In the parable today, Jesus tells those listening that He is the gate. In addition, He is the shepherd who guides the sheep into the pen at night, and out into the wide open pasture during the day.

We know that during cool winter months sheep were kept inside a pen that usually had a stone wall with briars on top. Pens were also built into caves or on hillsides surrounded by stone

walls. The shepherd would lay down within the gate to keep the sheep in and keep out any predators. The Shepherd didn't think about himself, he thought about his sheep.

If you've ever known a rancher during calving season, they are on call day and night for their animals. By golly, they'll sleep with their boots on while lying on the floor, lest they miss the alarm clock that gets them up every hour to go and check on the birthing mamas. These are the kind of shepherds Jesus is talking about. The faithful ones, the ones who have a heart for their sheep!

So a shepherd acted as a gate for his flock during the night. He protected them and watched over them. Then come morning, that same shepherd would guide the flock out of the pen and into pasture land. The gate marked the boundary which told the sheep what to do; rest or graze. They go out, then they come in, out and in.

Right now you and I aren't doing much of coming in and going out – or at least it has lessened dramatically! Right now might even feel like one of those revolving hotel doors that you step into and it just goes round and around and around!

We might tend to think of gates in a more negative way. The turn stile to get into a rodeo or concert only goes one way. The sharp blades of a rental car parking lot if you try to back up. A door that locks once you're inside. Jesus the Good Shepherd is not that kind of a gate.

His actions simply guide, we, His flock in and out. There is time to come together for worship when we gather together. Then there is time for the flock scatter and go do the work of being church, living in community but outside the pen walls. It's not the gate that matters. What matters is Jesus the Shepherd who leads us. What matters is listening to His voice.

Furthermore, sheep in the middle east, knew the voice of their own shepherd. They wouldn't follow any other shepherd. Just like your dog knows your voice and will bark at the voice of a stranger who comes to your home, sheep are the same way. A shepherd didn't walk behind the flock. There was no force of will upon an animal. Shepherds walk in front a flock – calling to them to follow. (It's not a cult, right!) Jesus our shepherd is out in front of us calling us to follow. All we have to do is listen.

At its simplest our life in God is just like that. We listen for God's voice to tell us where to go next and what to do. Worship. Grow. Serve. Rest.

In these days, so many of us are feeling the loss of not being with the rest of the fold. There is power in a sheep herd. A wolf cannot get to the whole herd, only one. Birds of a feather flock together. Sheep of a fold, are very bold. Not right now. Today, we are missing communal worship, eating donuts and having coffee. Notice those are all in one sentence! I know what's important to you! All kidding aside, we are missing sitting in our seat and catching up on each other's news. We miss the choir and the bells, Holy Communion. We have great sadness

because we cannot be with our friends at church. It is a loss and we are grieving. No doubt about it. Right now what we have literally is a locked church door. A closed gate.

But...have no fear little flock...the Good Shepherd has a heart for us. Jesus is still leading and still protecting and even yet...guiding His precious sheep fold. We only need to keep listening for his voice.

I was so very proud of the Leadership Team who met on Tuesday night via Zoom. This group of faithful sheep is concerned about you – the members of King of Glory. They are thinking outside of the box. Together they wondered how we can get even more connected in these days of physical distancing. “What about teaching more people about Zoom? What about the possibility of sharing devices so everyone can see church? What about...what about....?”

I have no doubt Jesus the Shepherd is still guiding we the flock. Our Leadership Team is listening to the Shepherd. He is leading us to pastures that we’ve never been in before, that’s for certain! Yet even here we find clear running streams of life, nourishment of food for our souls, paths to trod following the One who has a heart for us. He is gate – protecting us. He is shepherd – providing for us.

In the going out and the coming in, our now “sheltering” but transient church is gathering new sheep to the fold. We might be pasturing in place, yet more people are watching our pre-recorded worship services. Easter weekend alone, on Facebook, 873 people checked in to see worship. 2,347 people have watched the pre-recorded services via Vimeo. Prior to Coronavirus, we had on average 160 people in worship any given weekend. Think about all those sheep! Some of them are you and me, but many are not! That’s incredible!

The Shepherd who knows all time and space understands digital space, virtual reality, physical space and time as well. Our Shepherd has a heart for us. He leads us yet providing food, shelter, and comfort. Let us listen so we might be led through new gates and into new pastures trusting in the one we follow.

Amen!