

"THE SHEPHERD'S GATE"  
JOHN 10:1-10  
FOURTH S. OF EASTER  
MESSIAH, BOERNE  
APRIL 30, 2023

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY  
SPIRIT. AMEN.

READ TEXT: JOHN 10:1-10

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

LAST MONTH ON FOOD-FOR-THE-POOR SUNDAY WE MISSED THE  
GOSPEL READING FROM ST. JOHN ABOUT JESUS' MIRACULOUS SIGN  
OF RESTORING SIGHT TO A MAN BORN BLIND. THAT THIS MIRACLE  
TOOK PLACE ON A SABBATH DAY, THE JEWISH DAY OF WORSHIP,  
CAUSED THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO BECOME UPSET AND TO  
MISS THE MEANING OF THE SIGN COMPLETELY. INSTEAD OF SEEING  
JESUS AS GOD'S CHOSEN SERVANT, THE MESSIAH, SENT TO SAVE  
THEM, THEY ACCUSED HIM OF BEING A FALSE TEACHER. AT THE  
SAME TIME, THEY DECLARED THEMSELVES TO BE THE TRUE TEACHERS  
AND FOLLOWERS OF MOSES.

IN RESPONSE TO THE IGNORANCE AND ARROGANCE OF SUCH  
SELF-PROCLAIMED RELIGIOUS EXPERTS, JESUS SPEAKS THE WORDS  
OF OUR TEXT TODAY. HE RESPONDS BY TELLING THEM A PARABLE  
OR "FIGURE OF SPEECH" (V 6). IT'S FULL OF ALL SORTS OF  
PICTURE LANGUAGE, AND THIS MORNING I'D LIKE TO HIGHLIGHT  
THREE OF THESE PICTURES: FALSE TEACHERS, TRUE CHRISTIANS,

AND THE SHEPHERD'S GATE. MAY GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT ENABLE US TO CLEARLY HEAR THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE IN GOD'S WORD THIS MORNING AS HE CALLS YOU AND ME TO FOLLOW HIM. AMEN.

FIRST OF ALL, THE LORD JESUS BEGINS WITH A FRONTAL ATTACK ON THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS WHO WERE PRESENT: "I TELL YOU THE TRUTH, THE MAN WHO DOES NOT ENTER THE SHEEP PEN BY THE GATE BUT CLIMBS IN BY ANOTHER WAY, IS A THEIF AND A ROBBER" (V 1). THIS IS POWERFUL LANGUAGE. JESUS DOESN'T MINCE ANY WORDS. HE'S SPEAKING TO AND RESPONDING DIRECTLY TO THE RELIGIOUS "KNOW-IT-ALLS" OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. HE CALLS THEM "THEIVES AND ROBBERS" BECAUSE THEY TAUGHT THE PEOPLE THAT BY THEIR OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW THEY COULD SAVE THEMSELVES, NOT THAT SALVATION IS GOD'S GIFT TO EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN THE MESSIAH, THE CHRIST, AS THEIR SAVIOR. IN OTHER WORDS, THEY WERE ROBBING AND STEALING PEOPLE OF GOD'S FREE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST BY THEIR FALSE TEACHING.

NOW, THE SHEEP PEN IN PALESTINE AT THE TIME OF JESUS CONSISTED OF FOUR HIGH WALLS WITH SHARP OBJECTS MOUNTED ALL AROUND THE TOP TO KEEP OUT THEIVES AND ROBBERS WHO MIGHT TRY TO "CLIMB IN BY SOME OTHER WAY" (V 1). IN ONE OF THE WALLS WAS A SPACE A LITTLE WIDER THAN A MAN'S BODY. THE SHEPHERD STOOD IN THAT GAP WHILE FACING OUTWARD. AS THE

SHEEP APPROACHED TO ENTER THE PEN, THE SHEPHERD, WHEN HE WAS SATISFIED THAT ALL WAS WELL, TURNED HIS BODY SIDEWAYS SO THAT THE SHEEP COULD MOVE PAST HIM ONE BY ONE INTO THE PEN. THE SHEPHERD LITERALLY BECAME THE GATE TO THE SHEEP PEN.

IN OUR TEXT JESUS INTERPRETS THE GATE AS HIMSELF. THE POINT HERE, HOWEVER, IS SIMPLY THAT THE STANDARD BY WHICH EVERY TRUE MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL IS TO BE COMPARED IS JESUS CHRIST. IN CONTRAST TO FALSE TEACHERS, THE TRUE AND FAITHFUL SHEPHERD OF SOULS IS THE MAN WHO ENTERS THE MINISTRY FOCUSED ON CHRIST, DESIRING TO GLORIFY CHRIST, DOING ALL IN THE STRENGTH OF CHRIST, PREACHING CHRIST'S WORD, WALKING IN CHRIST'S STEPS, AND WORKING TO BRING MEN AND WOMEN, BOYS AND GIRLS TO CHRIST. JESUS IS THE GREAT OVERSHEPHERD OF THE SHEEP. PASTORS AND TEACHERS ARE HIS UNDERSHEPHERDS.

NOW, WE MAY BE TEMPTED TO THINK THAT THE AGE IN WHICH WE LIVE IS THE MOST ADVANCED THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN. BUT WHETHER IT IS OR NOT, WITH REGARD TO RELIGION, IT'S VERY SIMILAR TO THE WORLD OF THE EARLY CHURCH, AND WE CHRISTIANS MUST EXERCISE GREAT CARE WITH REGARD TO FALSE TEACHERS. A COMMON CRY HEARD TODAY IS FOR MORE PRACTICAL AND RELEVANT RELIGION. IN RESPONDING TO THAT CRY, SOME MINISTERS OF

RELIGION HAVE UNWITTINGLY DETHRONED CHRIST AND ELEVATED THEMSELVES BY OVEREMPHASIZING SOCIAL ACTION, HUMAN EMOTION, OR NUMERICAL GROWTH IN THE CHURCH. IT TAKES THE GIFT OF DISCERNMENT FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT TO NOTE THE DIFFERENCE, BUT IN ANY CASE, JESUS WARNS US ALL TO BEWARE, BECAUSE "THEY COME ONLY TO STEAL AND KILL AND DESTROY" (V 10a).

THE SECOND PICTURE JESUS GIVES US IS THE PICTURE OF TRUE CHRISTIANS. TRUE CHRISTIANS ARE THOSE WHO HEAR THE VOICE OF THE TRUE SHEPHERD AND "KNOW HIS VOICE" (V 4). THEY ARE SHEEP "WHO WILL NEVER FOLLOW A STRANGER; IN FACT, THEY WILL RUN AWAY FROM HIM BECAUSE THEY DO NOT RECOGNIZE A STRANGER'S VOICE" (V 5). WHAT JESUS IS SAYING HERE IS THAT CHRISTIANS HAVE A KIND OF SPIRITUAL INTUITION. AS ST. JOHN WRITES: "YOU HAVE AN ANOINTING FROM THE HOLY ONE, AND ALL OF YOU KNOW THE TRUTH" (1 JN 2:20). IN OTHER WORDS, TRUE CHRISTIANS HAVE A SPECIAL SENSE THAT TELLS THEM WHEN THEY ARE LISTENING TO A FALSE TEACHER. THAT IS WHAT PAUL WAS ENCOURAGING THE CHRISTIANS AT THESSALONICA TO DO WHEN HE WROTE THEM: "TEST EVERYTHING. HOLD ON TO THE GOOD. AVOID EVERY KIND OF EVIL" (1 THESS 5:21-22).

YOU KNOW, IT'S TRULY AMAZING HOW A LITTLE LAMB CAN RECOGNIZE ITS MOTHER'S BLEAT AMONG A CHORUS OF BLEATS. THE LAMB HEARS AND DISTINGUISHES ITS OWN MOTHER'S BLEAT FROM A THOUSAND OTHERS. IN A SIMILAR WAY, CHRISTIANS ARE GIVEN A

SENSE OF DISCERNMENT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT THROUGH THE WORD.  
ON THE BASIS OF GOD'S REVEALED WORD, A CHRISTIAN CAN  
DISTINGUISH BETWEEN FAITHFUL TEACHERS AND THE UNFAITHFUL.  
HOWEVER, LIKE WITH SO MANY THINGS, UNLESS A CHRISTIAN  
*EXERCISES* THE GIFT BY ATTENDING CHURCH REGULARLY, LISTENING  
TO FAITHFUL SERMONS, PARTICIPATING REGULARLY IN BIBLE  
STUDIES, AND HEARING THE TRUE SHEPHERD'S VOICE, THAT IS,  
JESUS' VOICE, THE GIFT CAN BE LOST.

THE LAST PICTURE JESUS GIVES IS ONE OF HIMSELF AS THE  
SHEPHERD'S GATE. HE SAYS, "I AM THE GATE; WHOEVER ENTERS  
THROUGH ME WILL BE SAVED. HE WILL COME IN AND GO OUT, AND  
FIND PASTURE" (V 9). MOST OF US HAVE SEEN PICTURES OF THE  
GREAT WALL OF CHINA. THE WALL IS SO LARGE THAT IT IS THE  
ONLY HUMAN STRUCTURE VISIBLE TO THE NAKED EYE BY ASTRONAUTS  
ORBITING THE EARTH. IT WAS BUILT BY THE CHINESE TO KEEP  
MARAUDING BANDS OF MONGOLS FROM ENTERING CHINA. IN A  
SIMILAR WAY SIN HAS SEPARATED US FROM GOD AND STANDS AS AN  
IMPENETRABLE BARRIER BETWEEN OUR CREATOR AND US. ONCE WE  
RECOGNIZE GOD'S PERFECT HOLINESS AND REALIZE OUR UTTER  
SINFULNESS, WE CANNOT BUT BE FEARFUL OF HIS WRATH AND  
PUSHMENT. WE ASK OURSELVES: "HOW CAN I APPROACH GOD AND  
DRAW NEAR HIM? HOW CAN I GET AROUND, OVER, OR THROUGH THIS  
BARRIER OR WALL OF SIN THAT SEPARATES ME FROM GOD?"

THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN PROVIDE THE ANSWERS TO THESE

QUESTIONS IS GOD HIMSELF, AND HE DOES SO THROUGH HIS SON JESUS CHRIST. JESUS SAYS, SO TO SPEAK, "I AM THE GATE THROUGH WHICH YOU CAN PASS IN ORDER TO GET TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GREAT WALL OF SIN. THERE'S NO OTHER WAY, NO MATTER WHAT YOU BELIEVE OR WHAT OTHERS MAY SAY. EVERY SHEEP *MUST* ENTER THROUGH ME IF HE OR SHE WOULD JOIN GOD'S FLOCK, AND EVERY PASTOR AND TEACHER WHO WISHES TO BE AN UNDERSHEPHERD OVER GOD'S FLOCK *MUST* FOLLOW AND LEARN FROM ME."

THE COST AT WHICH JESUS PROVIDED THE PASSAGEWAY THROUGH THE BARRIER OR WALL OF SIN IS BEYOND OUR HUMAN COMPREHENSION. HE DIDN'T RAISE AN ARMY AND WITH MILITARY MIGHT BREAK DOWN THE WALL. HE DIDN'T COME WITH SILVER AND GOLD AND BRIBE THE BORDER GUARD. HE SHED HIS BLOOD AND GAVE HIS LIFE ON CALVARY'S CROSS AS THE ALL-SUFFICIENT SACRIFICE FOR SINS. HE DESTROYED THE BARRIER BY ABOLISHING IN HIS FLESH THE LAW WITH ITS REGULATIONS AND RECONCILING US TO GOD. NOW, WHEN WE PASS THROUGH THE DOOR KNOWING WHAT JESUS DID AND BELIEVING IT FOR OUR SALVATION, WE ARE FREE TO GO DIRECTLY TO GOD WITHOUT FEAR.

WHEN I WAS THE PASTOR OF ST. PETER LUTHERAN CHURCH AND SCHOOL IN HUNTINGTON, INDIANA, WE LIVED IN THE PARSONAGE FOR SEVERAL YEARS, AND THE DOORS OF THE PARSONAGE WERE CONSTRUCTED IN THE TRADITIONAL WAY. IN OTHER WORDS, EACH

DOOR WAS MADE WITH FOUR RECTANGULAR PANELS IN IT, TWO SMALLER UPPER PANELS AND TWO LARGER LOWER PANELS, THEREBY FORMING A ROMAN CROSS. IN THE MIDDLE AGES THE CARPENTER'S GUILD CHOSE THE CROSS AS THEIR SYMBOL AND THE VERSE "I AM THE DOOR" AS THEIR MOTTO. THEN THEY DELIBERATELY BUILT THE CROSS INTO EVERY DOOR THEY CONSTRUCTED. IT WAS INTENDED TO TURN PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS HEAVENWARD TO GOD, TO POINT THEM TO THE DOOR OF ETERNAL LIFE THAT JESUS HAD OPENED FOR THEM BY HIS SUFFERING AND DEATH ON THE CROSS AND HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD.

DEAR FRIENDS, AS SHEEP IN GOD'S SHEEPFOLD, LET'S FOLLOW THE VOICE OF OUR GOOD SHEPHERD, JESUS CHRIST. MANY FALSE SHEPHERDS AND FALSE VOICES MAY CALL US TO FOLLOW THEM, BUT WE LEARN FROM GOD'S WORD THAT THEY WILL ONLY LEAD US TO DEATH AND DESTRUCTION. WHEN WE HEAR THEIR VOICES, LET US FLEE, BUT WHEN WE HEAR THE VOICE OF JESUS, LET US FOLLOW, BECAUSE CHRIST CALLS US TO ENTER BY THE GATE WHICH IS HIS OWN PERSON AND WORK, HIS SUFFERING AND DEATH FOR OUR SALVATION AND RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION FOR ETERNAL LIFE IN HEAVEN. BY FOLLOWING THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE AND ENTERING THROUGH HIS GATE, WE WILL ENJOY LIFE TO THE FULL, NOW AND FOREVER. AMEN.