

THE GATE
[written in oral form]

John 10:1-10; Psalm 23
Easter 4, Year A

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The Psalm lesson is the enduring Psalm 23, which we know starts, "The Lord is my shepherd."

Today's John passage features sheep and shepherds.
Verse 11, states Jesus saying, "I am the good shepherd."

These references to sheep and shepherd do not surprise us, and that is fascinating.

We are not baffled because we have been taught this nomenclature.
We know this bucolic language.

I do not get to use bucolic very often, so I did not want to miss the chance. It means: relating to shepherds.

This is Bible talk,..... and it is mostly irrelevant to the secular world.
Yet, we absorb it without barely a question.
Fascinating!

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Raise your hand if you know a shepherd,.... or...if you have sheep, or even familiar with sheep. [ ]

Oh, never mind. I cannot see your hands. [ ]

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Well, I have had the good fortune to live in rural areas, and I know a number of sheep farmers.

This past week, I contacted one. I found out that sheep really do respond when called, and they have names or numbers, and they know their shepherd. He would call himself a farmer, not a shepherd.

I was surprised, and commented that I did not think sheep were very intelligent.
He replied, "When people call sheep stupid, it's because they were outsmarted by the sheep."
Interesting.

The point is that most of us know very little about sheep and shepherds, and so the Biblical stories are out of context for us.

So much is lost when that happens, and the story loses its edge.

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Back then, "shepherding" was valued, yet not so the shepherd.  
Their status was at the bottom. This is much like many minimum wage service jobs, today.

Instead of shepherd, we could insert "support worker" at a long term care home,.....Or, a "Child Day care" worker,... Or, a farmer.

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I wonder why we **do not value** those who care for what we **so dearly value**? [repeat] Their wages reflect our level of value.

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How does knowing this alter your perception of a shepherd, including the "Good Shepherd"?

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I wonder what **is** affecting our regard to those "essential" workers?
What is tainting our thoughts? Why do we devalue them?

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In today's section of John 10, Jesus calls himself the Gate.  
This is the gate to the pasture / to a place that is supposed to be safe.  
It is the area of a better and more abundant life.

Relate this to passing through security at an airport.  
Or, it's like your computer's firewall and anti-virus protection.  
And, I suppose it could be similar to a bouncer.

The gate screens and filters what goes through/ what comes in.  
Still, as Jesus noted, it is possible for threats / elements of destruction to sneak in another way.  
So, as in life, nothing is perfect. Even the safe pasture needs a protector, to remain safe.

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To the lesson from this text.

We constantly have to discern information and input.
We constantly have to make decisions,.....based on our protocol and set of values. How we decipher / our bias is our filter.... our gate.

What is the filter when someone declares, "The strong and young should be free to mingle and work.
Let the weak and feeble isolate."

What is their filter? What allowed that regard to fester and form?

I dare say, it is Not Jesus. It's not God's way.
God emphasized compassion for the weak and feeble.
Likewise, Jesus taught social justice, and criticized the powerful who abused or disregarded the poor and weak.

The "Law of the Jungle" gate invites abuse and destruction.
The strong surviving is Not abundant living, because it lacks love, grace and compassion.

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There are numerous paradigms that act as gates to opinions and decisions.  
It could be the priority of financial security and accumulation.  
It could be a selfish, individualism that invites in revenge and redemptive violence.  
It could be insecurity and loyalty to authority that allows tyrants into the inner sanctum, and so forth.

The lesson from Jesus, in John 10, is:

If you want a higher level of living then trust a higher level to be the gate / the filter for your life.  
Think about that.

Jesus lived and taught God's way--the higher level.

This connects to today's theme: "listening and hearing."  
Which means "Listening and hearing" God's way--as Jesus presented.

Subsequently, we need to download that app. / We need to know the Gospel lessons, such as the Sermon on the Mount, intimately know it.

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Using God's desires to filter input / what confronts, according to Jesus, will grant real and abundant living,.....for all.

Jesus the gate is more than asking, "What would Jesus do?"
It is knowing and using the Gospel lessons. It is living God's way.

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Moreover, this way of being is a faith pilgrimage, and threats, doubts and setbacks will frequently sneak in and cause undue destruction.

Therefore, we need active / interactive support and assistance.

The Bible calls that the role of the shepherd.

We could call that personal support "a healthcare worker" or an advocate or....a dear friend, or simply:  
the abiding love and grace of God.

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A final word of advice: it is wise to update your firewall and security screening.
To avoid a crash or a malware intrusion, only invite the good stuff in.

Allow the divine to thrive within, and look to God for protection.

Oh, ... a final bonus. It's free. It's a gift.

God really does love each of us, and wants the best for us.
That is our faith.