

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

What would we do without doors? I mean, they're so very important. Doors provide privacy. They provide protection. They even provide possibility. Walk through the door on your first day at a new job or your first day at school or through the doorway into the gym or arena for your graduation or through the church entryway on your wedding day or the sliding doors at the hospital when a baby's on the way. Doors do provide possibility!

Doors matter so much everywhere in our lives. Sometimes the same door can mean two different things. In prison, the front gate can be an exit that means freedom or an entrance that means confinement. A front gateway on a fortress or the main gate for a military installation can mean protection for those inside. A fire exit can mean safety from the danger within. Doors are everywhere—from grand archways and expansive entryways to the small or odd-shaped doors of closets in your home—and everything in between.

Yet as important as doors are in our lives, they are also one of the most common things that we see on a daily basis. Naturally we take them for granted. For example, did you notice the doorways you passed through on the way in here today? We take them for granted until we need them to be open like getting to the store or the post office before it closes or running for safety when a fire starts. We take them for granted until we need them to be closed like when bad weather strikes or danger lurks outside.

Doors were important back in Jesus' day as well in homes, in businesses, even in sheepfolds. You see, depending on the size of the flock and the size of the sheep pen, the sheep might have a door in the sheep pen or the shepherd might have to be the door. If there was no gate and no gatekeeper to open and close the gate, the shepherd had to position himself in the opening where a door should be. While his sheep safely grazed and played and slept in the sheepfold, the shepherd stood guard watching for thieves who might steal and kill his sheep or wolves that could slaughter the harmless flock. Nothing dangerous would get in unless the shepherd was seriously injured or even killed. The sheep would only leave their pen with the shepherd's approval.

So it's interesting that Jesus would use that kind of shepherding language to describe himself in John 10. ***"I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture."*** Jesus describes himself as ***"the gate for the sheep"***. He is the source of protection and the source of life for those who follow him. Through him, one finds life, but no danger whether physical or spiritual can overcome him.

Now these are truths we know about Jesus from his Word. They are truths we hear week after week in Bible study and Sunday School and in worship. In fact, the picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is one of the oldest and most familiar pictures in all of Christianity. It's a reason why the 4th Sunday of Easter with its readings from John 10 and Psalm 23 and its pastoral hymns is known as Good Shepherd Sunday.

Yet in this portion of John 10, Jesus describes himself as ***"the gate"***, the door ***"for the sheep"***, and that has to make you wonder, "As a follower of Jesus, do I take him for granted?" After all, his protecting care and rich blessing sometimes seem as common to us as the doors we enter and exit each day. He grants grace and mercy day after day throughout this life, even in the toughest of times, but what would we do without him?

Well, consider what would happen to sheep if they had no shepherd. They would be ***"harassed and helpless"*** (Matthew 9:36). They would have no protection from dangerous weather or murderous thieves or destructive wolves. Sheep have no defense mechanisms whatsoever. All they can do is move forward from green tuft of grass to green tuft of grass unaware of the dangers around them. That same lack of awareness also gets them hopelessly lost far from the safety of the flock. With no gate and therefore no shepherd, the sheep would be in danger at best and be destroyed at worst.

That picture of ***"harassed and helpless"*** sheep without a shepherd describes what your life and mine would be like without Jesus. By nature, you and I seem to be completely unaware of the dangers around us. In Jesus' day, he spoke against the Pharisees as ***"thieves and robbers"*** who took advantage of God's flock and fleeced them for their own gain, while putting the people under a tremendous burden of saving themselves before God. In our own day, it isn't just those who fail to teach God's Word in its truth and purity, but those who actively seek to destroy your soul. Why not click on this adult site or watch that R-rated movie? Why not focus on yourself and get what you want when you want it? Why not buy into our culture's philosophy that you are free to do whatever you want as long as you don't hurt anyone and as long as you don't tell me that I'm wrong?

Why not buy into the false idea that we're all worshiping the same God and that there's no reason to be so exclusive?

...But the Lord warns, **"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy..."** Behind every one of those attacks or temptations, you'll find Satan trying to lure you away into the eternal death of hell. Sadly, your sinful nature and mine just blindly comply proving that we really are nothing more than ignorant sheep. Yet even if you or I realize how dangerous the **"thieves and robbers"** of this world really are, how do you and I know where to go? On our own we can't find our way back to Jesus. We can't save or rescue ourselves. We can't even decide what to do, but that's why we need Jesus. That's why we need the Good Shepherd who is our door!

Earlier in John 10, Jesus told his enemies, **"The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice."** In the verse right after our text, Jesus says, **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."** (John 10:11)

You see, Jesus is that shepherd we so desperately need. He knows each of us by name. He leads us where we need to go. He cares for our every need, but most importantly, he even gives his life for sheep like you and me. Unlike any other shepherd of his own time, Jesus allowed his blood to be shed, allowed his life to be taken for the sake of his foolish, straying sheep, even for you and me who blindly court danger for our souls and stray far away.

It is this Jesus who is our gate. It is this Jesus who is our door, and as our door, he blesses us in two unique and beautiful ways. Just listen to what he has to tell us. **"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture."** Jesus is the one and only way for us to be saved from all who would destroy us. There is no other way. There is no other door. He is the only One who opens the way for you and me to be saved and to be kept safe. His protecting care is always there. Recall what we sang in Psalm 23(:4)! **"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me."** Yes, we are sheep, but we have nothing to fear because the Good Shepherd is our protecting Door.

Jesus also tells us, **"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."** What does it mean to have a **"full"** life? Does it mean that your life is full of activity? Does it mean that your life is full of stuff? Does it mean that your life is full of crossed-off to-do lists and bucket lists? All those things fill a life, but they don't make a life that is **"full"**.

You see, apart from Jesus, there is no forgiveness, no safety, no peace, no comfort, no contentment, no rest. With Jesus, however, you find forgiveness for your sin-ridden heart. You find peace for your troubled and worried soul when the dark and dangerous difficulties of this life threaten to overwhelm you. You find safety, confidence and contentment at moments when the Thief would abandon or destroy you. Through Jesus the Door, you find comfort from the fear of death or the grief death has caused because he opens the way to your own empty tomb. Above all, he gives you rest for your soul as he takes your worries, your fears, your stress on his own shoulders.

The full life promised by the Good Shepherd, proved with blood and sealed with an empty tomb, is a life with this assurance from Jesus. "I am your Defense. I am your Redeemer. I am your Peace. I am your Resurrection. I am your Life." Jesus gives you that life—free from guilt and free from the fears and worries of your everyday life.

By faith in the sure and certain promises of God's Word and given to you through Word and water and meal, you have real life...and you have it abundantly! No one else can give you life like that. In the midst of guilt, you have grace in abundance through Christ. In the midst of sorrow or grief, you have joy in abundance. In the midst of strife or fear, you have peace in abundance. That doesn't mean your life is filled with cheesy smiles and skin-deep happiness, but through Christ you have an abundant life you can live every day because he is the door to that life.

It's my hope that you won't look at a door the same way after today. I pray that when you see a doorway—an entrance or an exit—that you'll give thanks for the One who is your Door, the One who provides you with protecting care and undeserved love. The Good Shepherd one day will open the door for you to everlasting life in him and he will give you that life to the full. Amen.