

SUNDAY 19 JULY 2020

JESUS: IN HIS OWN WORDS

'I am the gate'

*Lord I come to your awesome presence,
from the shadows into your radiance.
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness.*

As I come into God's presence, I choose to praise him in the words of Psalm 107:1-3.

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.
² Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
those he redeemed from trouble
³ and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.

Embedded as it is in the well-loved passage where Jesus speaks of himself as the good shepherd, it is easy to overlook Jesus' claim in John 10:7-10.

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.

Like his self-disclosure as the good shepherd, Jesus' claim to be the gate make no sense without the sheep. The image of the gate is full of meaning: Jesus is the protector of the flock, he is the point of entry into the flock, he identifies imposters who would damage or destroy the flock. Jesus is revealing himself not as a distant, disinterested leader, but rather one who is with and for his people. We should remember that this account is a continuation of the previous story (John did not write his gospel in chapters), and is part of Jesus' discussion with the Pharisees who were investigating the healing of the man born blind (see John 9:13ff). They had driven that man out of the synagogue. They were destroying the flock, breaking up the community that Jesus had come to save and restore.

Jesus makes it clear he is thinking about the life of the sheep as he speaks about being the gate in 9f where he explicitly identifies himself as the means to salvation (cf. 14:6). Here Jesus uses Old Testament imagery in his description of himself as the gate. The promise of entering through the gate to find salvation echoes Psalm 118:19f and identifies Jesus as the point of access to God for the flock. The promise of finding pasture recalls the imagery of Psalm 23:2 and Ezekiel 34:14. Jesus' promise of pasture (9) also recalls his earlier promises of gifts of water (4:14; 7:37) and bread (6:35) that will end thirst and hunger. Verse 10 draws a stark contrast. The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy the flock, whereas Jesus comes to bring life, and life in all its fulness (see also, 3:16; 5:24; 6:40, 51; 11:25; 20:31).

We pause and pray for those known to us who only experience life in a diminished, unfulfilled way, for those who face disappointment, and those who look for a new beginning. May they find the gate that leads to abundant life.

Pause and pray

Along with the blessings of salvation and security that the gate offers, Jesus adds that his flock will come in and go out via the gate. Our lives are not restricted by walls. Our security as Jesus' flock is not due to the walls of the sheep pen but to the presence of the shepherd.

Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. Those who do not believe in God have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. ¹¹ And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:10–12)

*In all my thoughts, may I think of you;
In all my words, may I speak of you;
In all my actions, may I act as you;
In all my interactions, may I love like you;
In everything, may I look like you,
More and more each day.
Amen.*