

Sermon for the 4th Sunday of Easter, Year A. Good Shepherd Sunday

The Text: John 10: 1-10

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. On this day we recognise that Jesus our risen Lord is indeed our Good Shepherd. As Psalm 23 says, he leads us to green pastures, and beside still waters. In our Gospel reading it cuts short of the part where Jesus says, 'I am the good shepherd'.

In this reading from beginning of John chapter 10, Jesus describes himself as a door or a gate. The word for door can also mean opportunity.

Let's look at what we know about doors and gates. What is their purpose? Why do you have doors in your house? Obvious isn't it? You want to keep out those whom you don't want in your house. The ones who you allow in your house are the ones you invite into your house. Even within your house are doors. You may close the door to your room for this may be your private sanctuary, and the ones you allow into your room are the people who are closest to you.

Jesus describes the people who try to get into your house by other means than invited through the door, are thieves and robbers. That

is why our doors have locks on them, to prevent thieves and robbers from entering through the door uninvited. Of course, as Jesus tells us what we already know, they will try to find another way in.

It's the same when you have a gate to your property, or a gate to the paddocks on your farms. The gates are there for a reason, to keep safe what is within, and to keep out that which is not allowed.

So, who is allowed through the door? Why is Jesus describing himself as the door? Jesus may be alluding to the ways that shepherds would gather their sheep into a pen by calling their names. They would follow the shepherd into the pen and the shepherd would sleep in the opening as there was no gate.

Why is Jesus telling us this? What has brought him to this point where he teaches about himself as the door or the gate?

You may recall the Gospel reading for the fourth Sunday in Lent, about the man born blind. When Jesus healed this man born blind on the Sabbath, it was the talk of the town. The man was brought before the Pharisees and they interrogated him and his parents. During the interrogation the man said to the Pharisees: "Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become one of his disciples?" This led the Pharisees to cast him out of the temple where Jesus came to the man and asked him: "Do you believe in the Son of God?" The man replied: "Who is he sir, that I may believe in him?" Jesus answered: "You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you." What did the man do then? He confessed his faith and worshipped Jesus.

Now today, Jesus says he is the door, he is the opportunity for all those who hear his voice, to come to him, to worship him and say, 'Lord I believe'.

Jesus calls you into the safety of his kingdom. There is no other way to enter. The way is through Jesus. Anyone who tries otherwise to snatch you away from the love and mercy of Jesus is a thief and a robber who tries to rob you of the joy of being saved.

The Pharisees tried to rob the man born blind of the grace that Jesus had shown to him, claiming it to be a sinful deed done on the Sabbath. They denied the joy the parents should have felt of their son receiving his sight. Even as we read further into John chapter 10 in verse 27, Jesus says: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of my hand. I and the Father are one."

It was that comment that stirred the pot for the Jews. When John speaks of the Jews here, it is all those who opposed Jesus. Just as they rejected what the man born blind said, they now rejected Jesus, accused him of blasphemy, they picked up stones and tried to arrest him, but his time had not yet come. Remember this happened before the events of Easter.

What does this mean for us? It means that there is life and salvation for all who hear Jesus' call to follow. Jesus has come to bring forgiveness and healing. Jesus has come to make his voice known. How is it known? Through his word. Through his word we hear that Jesus suffered greatly that we may know him.

As 1 Peter 2: 22-25 says: *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

What more can we say than, 'worthy is the lamb who was slain'? Despite our sinfulness, Jesus still calls us by name, and invites us into his kingdom. He invites us in and sets out a banqueting table of forgiveness, mercy, healing, acceptance and compassion.

You are all welcome. Do you hear his voice? A voice that says: Come all you who are weary and burdened. I will give you rest. Come, I will give you abundant life. Come in, I will keep you safe from the evil one.

The Pharisee, the Jews, the crowd, Satan, all may have thought they had silenced Jesus when he died on the Cross, but the Cross only showed to the world that Jesus is worthy to follow, for he was willing to give his life for his sheep.

Jesus is calling your name. Do you hear his voice? The blind man heard Jesus ask: "Do you believe in the Son of God?" He responded: "Lord I believe".

Jesus is the door. Jesus is your opportunity to know the love of God and be accepted into his family, simply by listening to his voice. Any other voices that want to rob you of receiving this grace that Jesus offers to you are thieves and robbers. You don't need to listen to those voices, because Jesus is calling your name. His is the voice that calls to you as you come and go in this world. Just as you come and go from the safety of your home, Jesus tells you to come and go knowing he is watching over as your good shepherd. Jesus knows you by name. May that be your comfort and peace. Amen