



## Pentecost 4

July 2, 2017 – 9:30 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

**Theme: Jesus Is “The Gate for the Sheep”!**

### **Sermon Text: John 10:1-10 (NIV)**

**10** “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” <sup>6</sup> Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

<sup>7</sup> Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, **I am the gate for the sheep.** <sup>8</sup> All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. <sup>9</sup> **I am the gate**; whoever enters through me will be saved. <sup>[a]</sup> They will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

**Sunday Worship Service: 10:15 A.M. (Sunday School/Adult Bible Study 9 am)**

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Gates. Not Bill Gates. Gates. Gates provide access into backyards, job sites and even highly-secure military bases. Some are locked; some aren't. Some are manned; some aren't. Gates mark the boundary between two distinct places, spheres or areas. You might have a good relationship with your next-door-neighbors, for example, but when you want some privacy you can politely excuse yourself, walk through the gate into your backyard and trust that your neighbors won't follow you to your patio unless they've been invited to. If you motor up to the main gate of Fort Lewis, you won't be able to enter unless you have an ID card issued by the U.S. government that identifies you as a person with permission to be there. Gates separate places, spheres or areas. And typically, they serve as the only legal way into a restricted area. If you don't enter thru the gate, you can't get in—whether that's into your neighbor's backyard, a job site or a military facility.

In our sermon text for today—John 10:1-10—twice Jesus states emphatically:

## **"I Am the Gate for the Sheep"**

Palestinian sheep-pens in Jesus' day were usually made of flat field-stones or sunbaked clay bricks like the adobe ones Native American tribes have used for centuries to build their pueblo villages atop mesas in the arid Southwest. A single wooden gate was the only entrance into the structure, typically. Depending on the size of the sheepfold, several flocks could be sheltered within its walls at the same time. Gatekeepers were hired to oversee the flocks while they were inside the sheep-pen and to ensure that only shepherds whose flocks there could gain access to the pen. And so, Jesus told the **"Pharisees"** that **"anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper 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. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."**

You and I are Jesus' sheep! So we can exclaim along with the writer of **Psalm 100**:

**<sup>1</sup>Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.**

**<sup>2</sup>Worship the LORD with gladness;  
come before him with joyful songs.**

**<sup>3</sup>Know that the LORD is God.  
It is he who made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.**

**<sup>4</sup>Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.**

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**<sup>5</sup> For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues through all generations.**

We really do have a fantastic Good Shepherd in Jesus! His love for us is boundless; His grace is mind-blowing; His mercies made manifest so many times along our life's journey that we've lost count! But in our text, Jesus takes His "shepherding analogy" a different direction, asserting that He alone is **"the gate for the sheep."**

John writes that when **"Jesus used this figure of speech . . . the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them."** So Jesus made it crystal clear for them. He **"said again, 'Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.'"**

In Christ alone, our hope is found. He is our Rock and our Redeemer; our Righteousness and our Reward; our Savior and our Sovereign Lord! He is **"the gate for the sheep,"** who promises: **"whoever enters"** God's kingdom of grace **"through me will be saved,"** and will have free access to **"come in and go out, and find pasture"** in the pages and promises of His Word! It's only by Spirit-worked faith in Christ that anyone can enter the kingdom of God or become a full-fledged member of His flock. Ever since Adam and Eve deliberately disobeyed God's injunctive to keep their mitts and mouths off **"the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,"** for—as He'd warned them—**"when you eat of it you will certainly die"** (Genesis 2:17), every single one of their descendants has entered this fallen world as a slave to sin, destined for everlasting damnation in hell. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that there absolutely no exceptions. The Holy Spirit had wise King Solomon write: **"Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins"** (Ecclesiastes 7:2).

Satan led a coup in heaven in a vain attempt to usurp God's role as the Sovereign Ruler of the universe, and the Lord tossed him and his co-conspirators out on their ear and created hell for them to inhabit. Jesus said that hell is a place where there is **"weeping and gnashing of teeth"** (Luke 13:28); a place where the souls of those who departed this life in unbelief will languish forever, longing for another chance to put their faith and hope in Jesus as the only **"gate"** into heaven. But, alas, they won't get that chance. That chance only comes on this side of the grave. That's why Satan makes such a concerted effort to try and keep us from making the cut for God's team; that's why he works so cunningly to cull us from Christ's flock. Satan is a terrorist. He'll try to hijack us from the path God has us on. His goal is to steal our joy, end our lives and destroy our relationship with God—and he's very aggressive about it. If there's anything he can do to interfere with our abundant life as members of Christ's flock, he'll make every effort to accomplish it.

He's had many millennia to perfect his craft since that fateful day. For example, a recurring bill—like a mortgage payment—might scream at us every month that it's not financially feasible for us to remain in the calling God has given us. A relationship may drain us of the energy God gives us and hamstringing us in our ability to serve Him faithfully. Or the devil

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might lead us to believe that our witnessing efforts are ineffective or that we lack any tangible spiritual gifts with which to serve the Lord effectively.

The enemy's tactics are relentless and limitless, and his intention is plain: get God's flock to wander away from Him, lead us astray, drive us to despair of God's forgiveness, or inflate our overweening pride so that we view God's Word and Sacraments as unnecessary. Satan wants us to mistrust Jesus and make decisions based on fear and anxiety, rather than faith.

What's the antidote to the venomous lies of the **"ancient serpent"** (Rev. 20:2)? Jesus is. He's the gate into God's kingdoms of grace and of glory. He paid the price to set us free from our captivity to sin, to loose us from Satan's grip on our soul and to ably equip us by His Spirit to contend for the faith He endowed us with at our baptism into Him. Jesus' mission was to give us abundant life. As He states in our text, **"The thief"**—Satan—**"comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."** That doesn't mean that our lives will be carefree. Far from it, in fact. But Jesus' life wasn't carefree, either, by any stretch of the imagination. His temptations were tougher, His suffering far deeper, the agony He endured at the hands of sinners was way beyond anything that you or I will ever suffer as members of His blood-bought flock.

The writer of Hebrews urges us to **"fix our eyes on Jesus, pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God"** as Victor over every one of our spiritual enemies! He adds, **"Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart"** (12:2-3). Our new life in Christ isn't always easy and comfortable, but it is in our best interests, since it's founded on His joy. When we're confident in God's will, and circumstances arise that seem to contradict it, we must know where they come from and cling to God. If we let circumstances constrain us, or sap us of joy, Satan will manipulate us indefinitely & string us along our whole lives in uncertain, fear-induced steps.

The **"gate for the sheep"**—invites us to have an intimate relationship with Him, and we knowingly choose to offend Him. That's absurd! If we really believe the truths of the gospel, know the futility of defiance, and still persist in our rebellion, isn't that by all standards irrational? And yet, every Christian—including you and me—can relate to St. Paul's confession, **"This evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing"** (Rom. 7:19). Many **"sheep"** struggle with habitual sin. It has power—from the world, our flesh, and the **"thief."** And the power is intense. We're to forsake it. But only Christ can break it. If this is your struggle, ask Him to break it now. Cry out to Him. Don't stop asking until He does, and know that He will! Christ is stronger than the **"thief,"** and His will is that we have life in its fullness! So enter through **"the gate,"** fellow **"sheep"** of the Good Shepherd through Spirit-wrought faith. For Jesus says, **"I am the gate for the sheep."** Amen.

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