

Sermon for Sunday, April 30, 2023
Fourth Sunday of Easter - Good Shepherd Sunday
“Gate on the Move”
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[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved People of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Today on Good Shepherd Sunday we celebrate that Jesus is our shepherd. Every year on the fourth Sunday of Easter we hear part of the 10th chapter of John in which Jesus talks about shepherds and says that he is the Good Shepherd. Except, he doesn't say that today. If we read one more verse Jesus would say that, but this reading cuts off just before then. We'll hear the actual "I am the Good Shepherd" part next year. What we do get today is Jesus saying, "I am the gate."

This metaphor of Jesus as the gate is not a well-loved metaphor; it's much less popular than the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. There are no Gate Lutheran Churches. We never celebrate Gate Sunday or sing hymns like The Lord's my Gate. Good Shepherd does draw on this image of the gate at the front of our sanctuary. These weavings were inspired by this Gospel passage today. Each weaving has a "gate" – open sections for pieces that change with the seasons of the church year. I love these weavings.

Still, until a few years ago, I struggled with the image of Jesus as a gate. It felt narrow and exclusive, as if Christianity is some kind of gated community. But then, our Good Shepherd Sunday School had a powerful experience with a shepherd, a sheep and a gate - an experience that has stayed with me ever since and given me a deep appreciation for the image of Jesus as a gate.

Our Sunday School took a field trip to visit shepherd Barb Kraus and her sheep at Canoe Creek farm. During our visit, we got to help lead the sheep from the barn, up a little hill and into a sheep pen. The sheep didn't really listen to us and things got pretty wild and wooly for a bit. The sheep did listen to the voice of their shepherd, Barb, and eventually the sheep and the kids got safely into the sheep pen.

Well, all but one of the sheep got safely into the pen. There was one little guy who went the other direction out of the barn. He wandered around awhile until he made it to one of the fences on the other side of the pen, but he wasn't at the gate so he couldn't get in. To get to the gate he would have to go down a hill, around the barn, and back up a hill. He couldn't see the way in, and Barb was busy helping the kids and other sheep, so he was stuck outside the pen for a while. There were no visible wolves or thieves or bandits, but that little sheep looked so vulnerable outside of the protection of the sheep pen.

And he clearly wanted to be inside. He kept making this very loud crying, bleating sound over and over and over again. He kept running along that part of the fence, butting his head against it, trying to get in. The other sheep would come over to him and you could tell they wanted him inside with them. The kids and all of us wanted him in too, but he wasn't at the gate and we couldn't get him there.

We see that little sheep everywhere in our world today in people desperate to get into places of rest, safety, and community. Sometimes each of us is that little sheep. Sometimes we feel cut off from others and from God, at the mercy of thieves that steal and kill and destroy the abundant life that God longs for us to have - thieves like cancer, anxiety, grief, heart break, our own white supremacy. All of God's people, all God's sheep, should have a resting place where they can go in and out and find safe pasture, yet there are so many barriers, so many obstacles. We run ourselves ragged trying to find a way into nourishment, to peace, to well-being for all, into community.

Is there some gate, some path, some answer that we're missing? Something we just haven't found that could help us and the world we love. Of course, there's always something that might help, but it can feel like a long way around a winding path to get there; and we're not always sure if we have enough energy or commitment.

Jesus says he has come so that all may have abundant life. Yet how do we access that? How do we make it available to others? How do we get to the gate ourselves and help others find it? Jesus says, "I am the gate." That means that the gate is not a spot we have to find. The gate isn't a thing that sits just waiting for us to take the right path, overcome the obstacles, and get to the correct spot in the fence.

The gate is the Good Shepherd who is always searching for all of us, always working to draw us all into God's abundance. The gate is not a fixed, rigid place but a living shepherd who is alive and on the move, always opening space for us all to experience the life God wants us all to have. The gate is Jesus' own body which is broken open for us all.

Jesus meets us, meets you in his body and blood to let you taste and experience forgiveness and love and rest and nourishment. Jesus offers his very body as space for reconciliation with God and one another, as space for us to enter into abundant life. Jesus draws us into his body so that we become an access point for others, so that we can make God's abundance available to others.

Today, Jesus our living, moving shepherd meets you here, under these gates.
He has prepared a feast before you.
He gives his very body for you so that you can give of yourself.
He calls us to the feast today, so that all may be fed.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.