

The Gate/Voice that leads to Abundant Life

[Acts 2:42-47](#)

[John 10:1-10](#)

Jesus the Good Shepherd. The shepherd who calls his sheep and they know the sound of his voice so follow him. It is such a familiar image for us yet the people of the day found it perplexing. "Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them." So Jesus went on – I'm not just the shepherd he said, I'm the very gate of the sheep. Now I'm lost. How is Jesus the gate? not the gatekeeper but the gate itself?

The image here seems to be of a walled enclosure which was used by several shepherds for their herds. The legitimate shepherds were able to come to the entrance and call their own sheep from among the herds gathered there. Anyone who was trying to steal the sheep would try to get it on over the wall, not by the gate.

and Jesus is the gate. The gate which allows in legitimate shepherds and which lets the sheep come and go as they need to get both nourishment and shelter.

"I am the gate of the sheep," reminds me of "I am the way, the truth and the life" because I also puzzle about how a person can be the way, not the way shower but the way itself. Both of course are metaphors but odd ones because they seem to be such tangible, physical things. A gate. A path.

And of course, tucked into the subtext here is Jesus' identification not just with these physical things but with the God of Moses, the great I AM Who I AM. So Jesus is saying, I am one with Yahweh, the God of Moses and I am for you the gate and the path.

Jesus is the gate through which we may find salvation or healing, and through which or whom we may find pasture or nourishment. In contrast to thieves and bandits, Jesus is not out to exploit the sheep for what he can get but is come to give us abundant life.

I think this is the key point in this passage.

By coming in and going out through the gate that is Jesus, we may have abundant life.

Abundant life!

There are different ways we may experience abundant life. One way is laid out in the reading from Acts this morning. In the halcyon days of the first Christians, "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. "

That way is not available to us at this time. It sounds like the kind of gathering and community that many of us are longing for, but that also helps viruses have abundant life.

So we get to think about the abundant life that wells up from within and fills us up so that we flow over with abundant life, even when our bodies hurt and our minds are discouraged.

When you are feeling discouraged and anxious it can be difficult to hear the voice of any shepherd, let alone the right one. It is easier to hear the voices of the thieves and bandits who steal our joy and our life. One of those is very close – our own inner voice or voices. My ego does not need to clamber over a wall in order to call weird stuff to me. Other voices come from outside, from the television news or the New York Times or Facebook or wherever you connect with what is happening beyond the confines of sheltering at home.

How are we to hear the voice of our shepherd? how are we to find the gate when there are thieves and bandits in the sheep pen scaring us stupid? how are we to find abundant life when the things that usually give us life are limited or unavailable?

The Dalai Lama is reputed to have said “I’m not very good at meditating which is why I practice so much!”

Spiritual practice. I think that is the answer. We identify the voice of Jesus at this time by practicing. What that practice looks like for each of us will be different. Which is why I’m excited about the class we’re starting on Tuesday morning using the book Soul Feast. This will provide a springboard for us to think more in-depth about spiritual practice and what works for each of us. Clearly the Dalai Lama meditates. That is not everyone’s way, and the way each of us practices will likely change over time.

But this is a time when we need to up our practice. We need to increase our listening skills so that we can hear the voice of Christ and we can fill up with abundant life.

I hear the voice of Jesus best when I pray without a lot of words, when I talk with others who are also listening for the voice, when I walk quietly observing the world around me, when I read books about other’s experience of God, and when I read the Bible and write sermons.

When do you best hear the voice of Jesus?

And when you hear the voice – what does it say? I don’t think I hear Jesus calling my name, or specifically giving me guidance. It’s more a sense of being connected to someone much bigger and deeper and higher than me. And in that sense of connection I know that I am seen and loved. Sometimes I do get specific guidance and that usually comes with a sense of rightness that feels calm and grounded.

Jesus’ voice may come to you in quite different ways. Don’t tell me you’ve never heard it – you have or you wouldn’t be listening to me now!

Jesus is in our own longing for spirit. Jesus is in our longing to be fed in rich pastures and to be sheltered in the sheep pen. Jesus is in our longings for oneness and healing. Jesus is in our longings for peace.

Jesus' voice may not be the loudest you hear, but it is always the voice saying "Peace be with you" and calling for forgiveness, compassion and serenity.

Just as the Dalai Lama practices meditation, so we need to practice identifying the voice of our own shepherd calling us so that we may go through the gate and find abundant life in the rich pastures of God.

May you hear the voice of Jesus calling, and may you know abundant life welling up inside.