

Sermon Text – Sunday, April 26, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

**1st Reading: Acts 2:42-47; 2nd Reading: Psalm 23
Scripture for Message: John 10:1-10**

What we just read is Jesus continuing a discussion with the Pharisees after the healing of the man born blind. If you remember that story, you might remember that Jesus has just challenged the Pharisees to recognize their guilt. He tells them, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.” Now I cannot claim to know precisely what Jesus meant by that, but I wonder if he referred to the fact the Pharisees claim that Jesus could not be “sent from God” because they “don’t even know where he comes from.” They had their pre-conceived notions of who the Son of God would be, and Jesus did not fit those notions. They claimed to “see” the truth but could not “see” what was right in front of them.

Jesus continues his discussion with them by relating a parable about sheep, a shepherd, and a gatekeeper. The gatekeeper opens the gate for the shepherd of the sheep who hear the shepherd’s voice because the sheep know the shepherd and follow the shepherd – they will not follow a stranger. They follow the shepherd because they have a relationship with the shepherd, a relationship that has been nurtured over time – the sheep trust the shepherd, and they know what they can expect from the shepherd.

John tells us that “Jesus used this figure of speech with the Pharisees, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.” Sometimes neither do we! We can read this passage over and over getting a different sense of Jesus’ meaning each time. Jesus frequently did not give them straight answers and because we are centuries removed, we don’t always get straight answers when we try to interpret scripture.

Reading the first part of this scripture we can believe that Jesus refers to himself as the shepherd who calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. That is in fact a Christian’s deepest desire – to know and be known by Christ – to hear him call our names. Christians read this and, because we are his followers, know that Jesus leads us to the safety and protection of the sheepfold. But then, as we continue to read Jesus’ explanation to the Pharisees, who did not understand, he tells them, “I am the gate for the

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sheep.” Does it muddy our comprehension to see Jesus as both shepherd and as gate? Let’s not get ahead of ourselves, Jesus will get to the Good Shepherd explanation but here he claims to be the gate which means someone or something else could be the shepherd guiding the sheep.

When we put this passage of scripture in the context of the other Lectionary readings today – who do we envision as the “shepherd?” Psalm 23:1 tells us, “The Lord is my Shepherd” and I believe the Psalmist was referring to God when they use the word “Lord.” But we know that it is Jesus who points to God, so how do we view the message in that light? Consider this – Jesus is the gate, opening the way for the sheep, us, to enter and hear the shepherd’s voice, God’s voice. Jesus, through his death, burial, and resurrection, has become the gate for us to approach the throne of the Lord and be cleansed of the sin that separated us. Those who enter through the gate Jesus provides, will find shelter and pasture in God’s kingdom. Is that an explanation of this scripture that makes sense to you?

Consider this then, since we often want to assign “personalities” to Jesus’ parables and if we assign the role of the shepherd to God and Jesus has claimed the role of the gate or gatekeeper, who or what are the thieves and bandits? Jesus says, “All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them.” Using simple logic, or maybe not so simple, Jesus claims to be the way to God, the gate. Those who came before him using that premise would be the Old Testament prophets and we can include John the Baptist who pointed the way to God even though people did not listen. Is Jesus claiming that the people that scriptures tell us were sent by God were thieves and bandits? Like I said earlier, sometimes we do not even understand Jesus’ stories.

Let it be known, I do not think Jesus claims that the OT prophets, who God sent to point the way, were thieves and bandits. I am not even sure that he refers to the Pharisees as thieves and bandits, if he were then it wouldn’t make much sense to us since we don’t live under Pharisaic law in the 21st Century. But here’s a thought – what are the things today that try to steal, kill, and destroy our faith? What is it that keeps us from the full, abundant life that we would find by entering the gate Jesus opens for us?

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There is a news series, “Kara Swisher wants to live forever” in it Swisher investigates the fast-growing world of longevity and anti-aging, cutting through the hype to separate real science from the wishful thinking. I don’t think Kara is trying to find the secret to eternity, but there are some who do. In this scripture Jesus tells us he is the gate to green pastures and still waters – to the peace of eternity. Jesus came so that we may have life and have it abundantly. The wishful thinking that comes to us through the hype of advertising and the temptations of worldly things only serve to steal, kill, and / or destroy our faith. All the products, gimmicks, and practices that are purported to extend our lives or make our lives better – we can say that they are the thieves and bandits because they can steal our joy and lead us to believe things that are not true. Eternity comes from following Jesus and doing God’s will – you won’t find it in a jar of face cream.

Jesus tells us that the shepherd’s own sheep will not follow strangers. When we focus on God and God’s words we are led to places of safety, green pastures and still waters. When we stay in that sheepfold, we will run from the voices of temptation and negativity – the strangers Jesus tells us about. When we follow the shepherd’s voice and have that nurturing relationship with the shepherd, we will turn away from the thieves and bandits of this world.

One thing that is important for us to note, however, is that we have to learn to know the shepherd’s voice. Shepherds needed to train their flock to recognize their voices. It is not some knowledge we are born with; it is not intuitive even for sheep to follow a shepherd’s voice – that is learned behavior. Jesus says the shepherd calls “his own” sheep by name and leads them out. I said earlier that for the sheep to know the shepherd’s voice they had to spend time together; a shepherd gets to know the sheep by living with them, eating, and sleeping in the fields with them – that is how they learn to recognize the shepherd’s voice. For the followers of Christ, the same thing is true – we must “waste time” with Jesus so we can know his voice.

How do we do that? Spending time in devotions, reading the scripture with our hearts and minds engaged. Spending time with other believers, in church, in bible study, in social groups. Spending

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time in prayer – quiet time with God is more than just a way to voice our concerns, it is how we pull closer to the creator and to the “one who walked on water.” None of these activities are a waste of time but they are ways that Christians can while away the hours with their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Wasting away the hours with someone creates intimacy and knowledge of that someone. As we learn more about Jesus, we develop that relationship and “know” his voice – Jesus leads his followers to human flourishing in God's kingdom. The sheep who enter the sheepfold through Jesus the gate are the ones who pay attention to God's voice as a counter to what or who tries to steal, kill, and destroy.

What does it mean for us to think of Jesus as the gate like he states in scripture? The gate to the sheepfold is the way in and the way out, it is not a barrier but a doorway. Jesus is the doorway to God and God's kingdom (the sheepfold). Only God knows who the true “sheep” are who come and go through the gate Jesus opens. Jesus the gate is a way through, not a way to separate the sheep. When we read further in John's text, we hear Jesus' claim to be the “Good Shepherd” who leads his followers to a safe place while at the same time providing the entrance into that safe place.

If we stay just in this passage however, we focus on Jesus as the gate and maybe we can get an image of the shepherd as the good news pointing to Jesus as Lord and Savior. That is the “role” the church plays in this metaphor. In the 21st Century it is the body of Christ, the church, who are the people who point others to Jesus – the gate. The church welcomes the seekers and the lost, showing them what living in God's kingdom looks like. The church is called to treat the stranger, foreigner, refugee, and outcast the way Jesus treats us – welcoming and accepting even the scars. We provide the opportunities that the followers of Christ need so they might learn to recognize God's voice. The church people are the ones who show with their living how we draw close to God and how we find the green pastures and the still waters God promises.

Right now, in this age, the church has the most significant role in Jesus' metaphor. We are the shepherds who lead people to the gate Jesus opens. Through community involvement and consistently standing for the justice, mercy, and compassion God promises people learn that the voice of the church is a voice they can follow

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– they know the voice and trust the voice. When the church is true to their faith – the sheep will follow that voice and run from the voice of strangers.