

When the right voice gets drowned out, bad things happen. How many times have you run into the wall? You know when it happens. Maybe it's some bad choices that you've made or that you're making right now, even though you know they go against Jesus. Maybe it's been a slow drifting away from your Shepherd after the things calling you. Don't think for a second that will end up well. Jesus describes it as even worse than a broken nose: *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy."* It is not an innocent thing to ignore the voice of Jesus. He is the only Gate to heaven! Despite what any other voice might tell you, without Jesus you will be left outside.

That's why we want you every single day to hear the voice of your Shepherd Jesus. You can't eliminate all the other voices you hear every single day. But you can make sure that the voice that stands out in your life above all the others is the voice of your Savior. Just listen to his words! *"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."* You have a Shepherd who was willing to die for his sheep. Who forgives you for every time you've run into the wall. Who loves you more than anything. Who right now is calling you by your name. Not a single one of you is here today by accident. Jesus brought you here, because you are his.

And today Jesus stands before you and makes a great declaration that he wants you to remember him by: "I am the gate." Do you get now why that is such a wonderful thing? What could possibly be greater than the doorway to God and to heaven? Jesus says, "Come to me and you will find pasture—rest. Rest from your sorrows. Rest from your worries. Rest from your sins. Rest from all the confusion you see out there." What can anyone else offer you compared with Jesus? He is constantly looking over his flock. He knows every one of you by name, and he loves you more than his own life. And one day, through his gate, you will go to eternal life.

I got to see the Gate in action again this week. A dear friend of our congregation named Arturo passed away this past Monday. He had battled cancer for a number of years and was weak and sick and suffering. And he spent these last weeks lying in a hospital bed, hardly able to talk. Even Muhammad Ali in his prime couldn't do anything for him. But Jesus could, and this past Monday he gathered up his sheep in his arms and walked right into heaven like only Jesus can. Because he's the Gate! Listen to his voice. Follow him. You will have life, and have it to the full.

John 10:1-10
Rev. Nathan Nass

Good Shepherd Sunday
May 11, 2014

"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ²The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. ⁷Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

I Am the Gate!

In 1964, a man made a very bold statement: "I am the greatest! I'm the greatest thing that ever lived!" Do you know who that was? The boxer Cassius Clay—later called Muhammad Ali. Still today he is known by that declaration: "I am the greatest!" And that's just what Jesus does today. He makes a declaration of who he is that he wants us to remember about him. He declares: *"I am the gate for the sheep."* But don't you feel like tapping Jesus on the shoulder and saying, "Umm, Jesus? Can't you do better than that? A gate? That doesn't sound that great." You'll see! Today's Good Shepherd Sunday, but Jesus wants to give us another picture of who he is: "I am the gate."

For that to make any sense, you have to understand whom Jesus was talking to. He was talking to the Pharisees. They were the proud, self-appointed religious experts in Israel. They were the kind of people who looked down at you when they talked, because they considered themselves the gatekeepers of the kingdom of God. If you wanted to get to heaven, you had to go through them. If you put it in terms of sheep and shepherds, they were convinced they were the wise shepherds, and all the people were sheep who desperately needed them to get close to God. So when this guy Jesus began telling people to believe in him, it didn't sit well at all with the Pharisees.

So Jesus decided to teach them the truth about shepherds and gates and sheep. *"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep."* If you're like me, you probably don't know too much about the shepherding practices of ancient Israel. But each night, sheep from different flocks were gathered together in a

pen that only had one gate. In the morning, each shepherd would come to that gate and call his sheep. They would hear his voice and follow him out. There is only one gate. Anyone who didn't use that gate was a robber.

I think you know what Jesus meant. But the Pharisees didn't get it. They were convinced that the path to God had to pass through them. So Jesus laid it out for them as clear as he could: *"I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture."* Is this starting to make sense? It was a bold declaration! There is only one gate for people to enter into heaven: Jesus. Any other shepherd with any other voice or message is actually a robber trying to hurt the sheep. Jesus boldly declared: "I am the gate for the sheep."

Compare that with what the voices around us today are saying about the way to heaven. Here are some of the things I've been hearing lately: "There are lots of different religions, but they all end up at the same place." "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you believe." "There are lots of different names, but it's all the same God." I don't know about the older folks here, but for people from my generation, this is what we've grown up with, isn't it? If Jesus were around today, he wouldn't be very popular. Because Jesus' claim to be the one gate to God doesn't fit very well with, "There are many paths to heaven, so just choose the one that works best for you."

Let's stop here for a second. Heaven is God's house, so apply that same logic to your house and see if it fits. Would you be willing to say to everyone here: "There are many ways to get into my house, so just choose the one that works best for you." If it's the front door—come right on in. If you want to break a window and crawl in, we'd love to have you. If you want to take a big bulldozer from over on Washington Ave., knock over a wall, and walk into my bedroom, hey—whatever works for you! That's ridiculous, isn't it? It's your house. You decide who gets to enter, and if anyone tries to enter in any other way other than the front door, you call the police!

So why do people expect God's house to work differently? Heaven is God's house, not ours. He gets to decide how to enter heaven, not us. Why would it be any other way? The beautiful thing is that God has decided to invite every single person to his house, without exception. You're invited! And here is the way God has chosen for people to enter his house: Jesus is the gate. You enter through faith in him. This is good news! You don't have to fight to get to heaven. You don't have to guess at whether you'll make it. God sent Jesus to save us from our sins, and so no one can be saved without Jesus. Jesus is very emphatic about that—"I am the gate for the sheep!"

With all this talk about sheep, Pastor Degner should be up here preaching. I'm the last person who should be talking about farm animals. But thankfully Jesus teaches us all that we need to know about sheep. He says: *"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." Jesus highlights one thing sheep are good at: They're not the brightest animals, but they do follow their shepherd's voice.

A pastor many years ago decided to test this out. He went out in the country, found a shepherd, and watched his sheep follow right behind him. Then the pastor asked if he could give it a try. So he called to the sheep, and they scattered in all directions. But he wasn't done. He asked the shepherd to swap clothes. So the pastor put on the shepherd's clothes and called out just the way the shepherd had called. And the sheep ran away. Then the shepherd put on the pastor's clothes and called out just the way the pastor had called. And they followed right behind him. Sheep can't do a lot of things well, but they are good at one thing: They know their shepherd's voice.

So, sheep of God, how well do we do that? The one thing we as God's sheep are supposed to be good at is knowing our Savior's voice and running away from the voices of strangers. And every single day we are flooded with voices: The morning news. The radio in the car and at work. Emails. Facebook. Internet sites. Texts. Phone calls. TV shows. Movies. Voices calling us from every direction! And every voice is trying to influence us. Every voice we hear is affecting our thinking in some way. There are voices telling you to question the Bible. Voices telling you to open up and live a little. Voices telling you not to tie yourself down with this religion thing.

We could go on and go. Voices telling you there's no time for Jesus. You're too tired, too busy. Voices telling you to hold God at an arm's length so he's there when you need him, but won't interfere with living your life the way you want to live. So can you still hear Jesus' voice? How often do we stop to listen to him? If Jesus' voice doesn't stand out very much for us today, it's not because Jesus' isn't calling. His Word is right here. It's because we're not taking the time to listen. Not every voice is right. Not every person wants what's best for you. There is only one Gate to God and heaven—Jesus! If only we could just be sheep who follow our Savior's voice.

Because it's dangerous not to hear Jesus' voice. There was a moment in one of my college basketball games that I will never forget. It didn't have anything to do with basketball. During a timeout, one of the fastest football players decided to amuse the crowd by trying to run a gopher on the college court before the timeout ended, with one catch—he was blindfolded. So he raced up and down the court, and a friend told him when to touch the line and turn. When the timeout was almost over, the crowd was cheering louder and louder. And as he ran his last full length, the crowd was so loud, that he didn't hear the voice of his friend telling him to turn around, so he crashed full speed into the wall, knocked one of the doors off of its hinges, and broke his nose.