

Easter 4  
St. John 10:1-10  
May 7, 2017  
St. George's Bolton  
Fr. Chris

## Pearly Gates

*"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."*

We would be the sheep. And we are all locked up in a fenced in, closed sheep pen, with many, many other sheep, most of whom we do not know or recognize. We are like grains of sand on the beach, this pen is so full. Surely someone must know us, recognize us! Someone will come and fetch us! There must be more to life than this!

To add to the problem of being cramped and cooped up in this pen, there are those who are trying their darnedest to take advantage of us, and steal some of us away. These are the host of false shepherds who demand our attention and would lead us astray for their own benefit.

The goal is to get out of this furry prison and roam about in the pasture, where we can graze freely and be the sheep we were created to be.

So we live in a gated community, this sheep pen. It is safe. We feel protected. We don't give the pen much thought. It is what we know. Outside the pen is an unknown world. It is human to fear what we don't know. This is an instinctive protection for survival. The pen lacks real food to sustain us; there is only the slop that gets tossed in for us to feed upon. And we do what

all the other sheep do, and most of the time, believe and think the way they do.

So we wait for our shepherd to come. We will recognize the voice of the shepherd. When we hear His voice, we will follow where He leads us. When he arrives, we will walk toward Him, and out the gate we will go, leaving behind the pen, the gated community.

Gated community? When I hear those words, I don't think about a sheep pen. I think about a place designed to keep me out and only let those who are entitled to enter, to go inside. It is a place surely to feel safe because of the gate. It is a place free from intrusions.

Gates are meant to protect us. In some cases they are meant to keep out intruders and nosey folks from invading private property. In other cases, they are meant to protect the animals at pasture from predators like wolves and coyotes who would like to devour the defenseless beasts.

If we are honest, the pen represents a group of innocent sheep who will either be victimized by these predators or who will ultimately be led off to the slaughter. Not a very attractive choice if you are a sheep. And for the purposes of this passage, that is precisely the suggestion Jesus is making about us.

Who are these thieves and bandits? They are false shepherds whose motive is about self-interest and advancement. Sometimes their motives are far darker. It is so important for us to be able to tell the difference when they come to steal us away from the sheep pen.

There are many false shepherds in the world. Daily they beckon to us from the television and the internet. They teach

us *what to want* and *what we need*. Sometimes they tell us what to believe. They sell everything from cars to aging creams, from sex to cheap religion, offering salvation for the price of donation. In campaign season they weave a fabric of lies about what they will do and about the other candidates who are also trying to be shepherds in the field. Truth is though, there is only one good shepherd, and this shepherd is neither Republican or Democrat, libertarian or liberal.

It is very difficult to hear the voice of truth when it speaks in this cacophony of deceit spewed forth from the mouths of these false shepherds. You have to listen with a filter, or maybe tune it all out and turn off the TV and the computer and the smart phone. The 24-hour news shows are sounding more and more like a Jerry Springer Show, where the voices are screaming so loud, talking over each other, that they drown out any semblance of truth.

Yet, the voice of Jesus is always there for us, calling to us. It resonates in the deepest places of our souls. You have to really listen to hear it. It is a gentle and loving voice. It is a voice we recognize and know, a voice which speaks the truth to us. If His voice is difficult to hear, it is because of the *noise* in our lives. We need to turn down the volume of this noise, and listen for the still small voice of God. He is calling us. In a quiet place we can hear him speak. He beckons us to come to the gate of the sheepfold. He is ready to lead us out into the pasture, into the field. Passing through Him, we *will* lie down in green pastures, beside still waters. He will revive our souls. He will guide us in the right pathway out of the pen into the pasture. [Psalm23-paraphrased]

Clear glass doors at the entrance to St. George's mark the entrance to our church, but are also transparent to the field

beyond those doors, where God is also found. Rest a while in this pasture this morning. Drink in the living water of Jesus.

When Jesus says he is “*the gate*,” he is not talking about a gate like the ones at the airport or a sporting event or at the entrance to a residential community. He is not a gate that keeps out the sheep. He is the gate opening wide to the new pasture where life abounds! He is like that glass door at our entrance. Truthful, transparent.

The Good Shepherd gives us all we truly need and provides for us daily. He gives us *our daily bread*, both providing for our physical needs and our deep spiritual hunger.

The one and only Good Shepherd calls us to selflessness and generosity of spirit. The Good Shepherd lifts up our heads, once buried in self-absorption, into the light of the goodness of the world surrounding us, in which God is caring for us always, relieving our anxieties and opening the gate of hope.

Instead of being mere sheep who are being led off to the slaughter, the voice of God calls us to be co-creators and shepherds with Him. We can create a better world around us with a few simple actions each day. Though we may feel feeble and weak, each simple act of kindness and generosity of spirit multiplies the strength of the Gospel in the world, just as the Gospel multiplies our strength to be and do good. We can help till the pasture and fields which God has given us, and create beauty with God in this world. Simple acts of kindness flourish into beautiful gardens filled with flowers which lift the spirit and comfort the soul.

And we are also called to be shepherds working in the field like Him, to help lead other sheep to find the gate before it is

too late. We should never give up leading the lost sheep, whom God longs to find, to the good pasture where they may find Him. How many of His sheep have you helped to find him?

Do you know the voice of the Good Shepherd? The Gospel implies we do. It is etched in our memory, our hearts and in our souls. Can you hear Him calling you? *“When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.”* The voice says: *“I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me.”*  
AMEN