

Based on John 10:1-10
Fourth Sunday of Easter

Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

John 10:1-10

This is one of the readings that can leave lots of people scratching their head. Jesus says he's the shepherd who is known by the gatekeeper and the sheep, but then he also says he's the gate. So, the gatekeeper opens Jesus to let Jesus in? Huh?

This is one of those times when the chapter and verse structure of the Bible coupled with the disjointed way we read it in worship kind of muddies the picture. The Bible, a collection of books written over a span of a thousand years by multiple authors, didn't originally have the chapters and verses we know today. In fact, it originally didn't even have punctuation or spaces between the words. Imagine trying to read that! The chapters and verses weren't added until about 500 years ago.

But this little story which is the beginning of chapter 10 is actually a continuation of the story in chapter 9, which tells of a young man, blind from birth, whose sight is restored by Jesus but who then faces arrest and persecution by the Israelite authorities, who refuse to believe that a) he was *really* blind and b) that Jesus healed him.

Because for them to accept that Jesus really gave him his sight means they have to accept that Jesus's power comes from God and that if Jesus's power comes from God, then Jesus' critiques of them are not only valid, but divinely ordained – they need to believe they are cross-wise with God and that is a hard thing to accept.

So, Jesus' parable here is actually a critique of those who would punish the formerly blind man because of their refusal to see God at work. These authorities, who act pious

and believe God is on their side because they follow the letter of the law, while hypocritically rejecting its spirit. They are like thieves because they have used their leadership of God's people to enrich themselves and hold themselves above account with no regard for the true welfare of the people.

Jesus is also saying that He is the truest understanding of God humanity has ever and will ever have. To know Jesus is to know God – He is the pathway, the gate as Jesus puts it to the best understanding of God and of what God desires of us that we will ever encounter.

There are many pathways to finding God, and all who seek Him in sincerity and live in humility with concern for others are surely blessed. But, Jesus here reminds us, the Way of Christ is the surest and clearest route there is.