

John 10.1–10

Jesus said, 'I am the gate'

Amington

Sunday 20 June 2021

Jesus said... [3]

Gates

I've spent this week thinking about famous gates... but can you name them all? ¶ (*Bill Gates, Gareth Gates, Gates McFadden, Brandenburg Gate, Watergate Office Building*).

Context

If I started to tell you a story about public transport, you would call to mind your own experiences of ¶ waiting for a train on a platform, breathing the hot stale air on the Tube, sitting in a not-very-clean bus. If I mentioned Diana, Princess of Wales (who would have turned 60 next week) a whole host of things would come to mind without me having to say anything else...

¶ Exactly that happened to his listeners when Jesus used the figures of speech in our reading. They all knew what he was talking about.

The problem for us, is that we don't know that context. People didn't write much about life in first-century villages.

For example, some think that the words 'sheepfold' and 'gate' should be translated 'courtyard' and 'door'. Most families would have owned a handful of sheep, and kept them overnight by their house in a small courtyard, secured by a door. They couldn't afford a shepherd each, so several families would club together. Each morning the shepherd would arrive in the village, and walk round collecting various sheep from the courtyards of various houses.

Others think that instead of one shepherd and multiple courtyards, there were multiple shepherds and one *large* courtyard. Every morning the shepherds would arrive, call out, and the sheep would all head in different directions towards the shepherd whose voice they recognised – a bit like the way children sort themselves into lines on the playground when the bell goes for the end of break.

Still others think Jesus is referring to the open countryside, where sheep would be gathered together overnight and the shepherd would sleep across the entrance, literally becoming 'the gate'. That might explain how Jesus can be both 'the gate' and 'the shepherd' – although from what he says, he's also the *entrance* through which the sheep **come in and go out** (9).

The thing is, if we needed to know all that to understand what Jesus was teaching, it would be in the text. That means: all that stuff about enclosed courtyards and sharing shepherds adds a richness to our understanding, but doesn't affect the *meaning*.

I will come back to what it means for Jesus to be the shepherd next week – but what does it mean for Jesus to be **the gate**?

Security

Did you hear about the one-armed security guard? He was great at protecting things single-handedly.

Jesus says is that he is not like the **thieves and robbers** who came **before** him (8). They want **to steal and kill and destroy** (10), whereas Jesus the gate keeps the sheep safe.

Gates provide security – something completely lacking from the vicarage garden. Anyone can wander round the back of our house – and sometimes they do, because there is no gate protecting the back garden. Jess doesn't like dogs, but even if she did we couldn't have one because it would simply run off.

Because gates provide security – in two directions. They stop thieves getting in, and stupid animals getting out.

Jesus is **the gate for the sheep** (7) – that is, he’s the security, and we are the sheep, the dumb animals who need protecting from thieves and from our own tendencies to wander off.

One thing I’ve been reflecting on this week is what that security means – and what it doesn’t. Sheep enclosed in a pen with a gate are protected from thieves and wandering off – but not from the weather, not from the storms.

Sometimes we might hear the Bible’s promises about protection – for there are many – and wrinkle our noses a little, thinking of all those times when we *wanted* protection from something bad, *but it happened anyway*.

That’s why I’ve been thinking about sheep, huddled together in a sheep-pen, while a storm rages. Friends, one day the storms *will* cease, one day God will wipe away *all* our tears. Until that day, Jesus **the gate** promises to keep his people safe from the enemy and from wandering off, no matter what storms might rage.

And in the meantime he gives a taster of that life...

Salvation

Our reading today ends with one of the most famous sayings of Jesus:

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.

John 10.9-10 (NIV)

Gates don't simply *stop* certain things from happening, they are also an opening, a way in and a way out.

This is one of several exclusive claims Jesus makes about himself – *he is the gate*. The fulness of life he talks about is only available *through* him. The *only* way into real safety, the only way into good pasture, is through Jesus. *He is the gate*. And he opens up to us the way of life, life in all its fulness.

But what does that mean? Does it mean he came to give us a set of perfect rules, and if we follow them we'll live life to the full? No! There is a family way of life – of course there is. Jesus warns us not to behave in ways that are harmful, and charges us to do things that are helpful and kind and loving, to support others.

But the essence of that life is far simpler, and Jesus hints at it here in these verses:

[The shepherd] calls his own sheep by name and leads them out... his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

John 10.3-4 (NIV)

At its heart, life in all its fulness, is a relationship, is knowing and being known by Jesus. He brings us into a new family, with one perfect Father, better than all earthly parents. And he gives us his Spirit, to help us live as sisters and brothers in that new family.

That life will one day be ours in full – but we can have it in part, today: if we come to Jesus the gate he will let us in.

You see, life in all its fulness doesn't mean leaving Jesus over *there*, in a church building and on a Sunday. Life in all its fulness begins with life in relationship with Jesus, not at certain times or in certain places, but everywhere and everywhen. It means learning his voice, listening to his voice, so we can follow when and wherever he calls us. But we're starting to stray into next week's passage, when we'll think about Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

This week, the question is this: **J** which gate will we walk through? The one that leads to life in all its fulness? Or another one?