

## March 20, 2011 John 10:1-10

Read 9:40b as intro to chapter 10 to show how it is continuous and connected. . .

I read this verse b/c it was a part of last week's text and it actually is not only a connection to our text today, but a continuation.

Last week's text was the story of Jesus healing the blind man and the Jewish leaders expelling him. The blind man could now see and it wasn't until after he spoke about who had done it does he meet Jesus. Faith w/o seeing – kind of the same situation in which we find ourselves as well.

This week's text, with Jesus saying, "I am the gate for the sheep," connects to last week's text – Jesus is saying he's the gate, the entrance into God's fold; it's not the legalism of the Pharisees that brings you to God. It is through Jesus that we belong to God and not through the rules themselves.

Last week, the Pharisees were telling the people that there were rules to follow and obviously that wasn't being done. They had lost sight in what was important – in who was important – while a once blind man gained sight into who was important and who brought belonging; he discovered Christ.

Jesus decides who belongs – not us, not the rules – Jesus.

We get to read these two stories together b/c of the narrative lectionary:

Chapter 9 – who belongs to Jesus

Chapter 10 – belonging to Jesus (others may claim us, but we don't recognize them); where do we recognize the one to whom we belong?

Sheepfold – circular wall of stones w/a single opening near a house or in open country; the shepherd would literally be "the gate" by laying in the opening so that the sheep did not leave during the night and dangerous predators would not get in; the shepherd calls to sheep in morning to go out to pasture and sheep recognize his voice and follow; the sheep do not respond to voice of stranger.

It's not really stretching it then, for Jesus to use the image of being the gate for the sheep as a figure of speech for who he is for us. For there are many things that try to claim us, but when we know who is bringing us true belonging, Jesus, the gate, we know whose voice we listen to.

The sheep go into the sheepfold for nurture and care and go out of the sheepfold to enter the pasture. The sheep can come and go from the sheepfold during the day.

We enter the sheepfold as well – our times that we gather together to worship, pray, and have fellowship together. It is here that we find nurture and care; where we may be reminded of the rest that we need; where we are comforted by our gate, Jesus, who protects us and draws us into the fold of a God who loves us and in whom we belong.

We are the sheep and Christ is our gate. Christ is the one who reaches out to us to draw us to him, giving us the gift of safety – the gift of life eternal – a promise.

And yet, the promise of salvation doesn't eliminate the threat of danger – thieves and bandits continue to seek and destroy; they bring things that try to destroy our relationship w/God – they try to promote unbelief in us. They try to get us not to listen to the voice of Jesus speaking to us.

The interesting thing is that sheep often have to be pushed through the gate; they're comfortable, maybe not ready to move and certainly have difficulty thinking for themselves.

Know where I'm going with this? We, too, can get pretty comfortable and must be pushed out into the world; we are not only called to be nurtured and cared for, but are called to go out into the world, knowing that we still belong to God and God as our gatekeeper has called us to share the good news.

Chris Rice, a Christian musician has a song entitled, "Good News" – I've got good news; it's water for the thirsty" Christ is our good news! And we can be stubborn and lazy as sheep sometimes, so we too, need to be pushed out through the gate to go into the world with this good news.

At the end of our reading in John 10 for today, we hear Jesus say, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

Now, that sounds like good news!

Our Christian identity is abundance of life! It is being about the more that God gives us; living and sharing in God's abundant life.

Our image will both continue and change next week as we keep reading John 10 and meet Christ not only as "the gate for the sheep", but also as "the shepherd of the sheep."

Listen for the voice of the one who cries out, "I am the gate of the sheep," and who reaches out with the gift of abundant life.

**Helpful resources:**

Narrative lectionary podcast

*Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, Craig R. Koester

*Living Beyond the Ordinary A Study of John* Jack Hayford, executive editor