

Good morning, Church.

Grace and peace to you from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The first thing to know about our gospel reading today is that it's a continuation of a discussion Jesus is having in chapter 9. In order to make sense of our verses today, you need to know the basics of what happened in chapter 9.

You might remember some of this as I go along, but briefly, in chapter 9, Jesus saw a blind man begging and his disciples asked if the man or his parents had sinned to cause him to be born blind. Jesus said, "Neither. Watch and see God's power and glory." Jesus made mud and caked it on the man's eyes and then instructed him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. The blind man did and came back able to see.

The blind man is questioned by the religious authorities. So are his parents. Finally, the authorities throw the blind man out of the synagogue for stating that God must have sent Jesus because everybody knows God does not grant a sinner their request. Just like that he is cut off from his community, family and friends. Jesus hears of this and goes and finds the man and Jesus helps him to see in a different way – Jesus brings him to belief – the man worshiped Jesus.

As we start chapter 10 Jesus continues speaking to the religious authorities, but he changes his figure of speech he is using. He starts talking about sheep, shepherds, gates, thieves and bandits, salvation and abundant life.

Eugene Peterson's translation of our gospel goes like this:
Jesus says, :
"Let me set this before you as plainly as I can.

If a person climbs over or through the fence of a sheep pen instead of going through the gate, you know he's up to no good – a sheep rustler. The shepherd walks right up to the gate. The gatekeeper opens the gate to him and the sheep recognize his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out, he leads them and they follow because they are familiar with his voice. They won't follow a stranger's voice. They will scatter because they aren't used to the sound of it.

Jesus told this simple story because the listeners had no idea what he was talking about. So he tried again. I'll be explicit, then. I am the Gate for the sheep. All those others are up to no good – sheep stealers, every one of them. But the sheep didn't listen to them. I am the Gate. Anyone who goes through me will be cared for – will freely go in and out, and find pasture. A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.

Jesus came so his followers might have abundant life, more and better than we could ever dream of. We access this life by hearing his voice, being called by name and following the Shepherd, recognizing his voice.

The shepherd provides, protects and is present with the sheep.

Having grown up on a farm, and one that had sheep at times, I'm quite familiar with gates. Some are wooden. Some are metal. Some are heavy. Some can be jumped over. Some can be pushed through. Some mysteriously come unlatched and open. Usually gates keep animals in or from

getting into an area or field that they shouldn't.

Off the farm we encounter gates in many areas of our lives.

There are gated communities, entry gates for theater and sporting events, toll gates.

There are also invisible gates that keep women, minorities and immigrants from certain jobs, schools and institutions.

These gates separate, close up, keep out.

But Jesus is a different sort of gate. Jesus is the Gate who excludes no one, calls each by name, offers abundant life.

Abundant life for the blind man was restoration of sight so he didn't have to beg every day for his meals. Abundant life for the blind man was also Jesus leading him to belief and worship. Abundant life for the blind man was welcoming him into the community and not being left in isolation.

Healing, belief and community are abundant life available to us, too.

Jesus says I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved. Jesus says I am the gate. Through me you will have abundant life.

Luke gives us a glimpse of that life as it was shared by the Christian community in Acts. It's a life where people get what they need by giving themselves away.

“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

That might seem impossibly remote as a standard for our own lives,
yet this is still our call as the body of Christ—
to give ourselves away for the sake of people who are not here.
And in our own way we are doing that as the people of God in this place.
We are giving ourselves away when we baptize and
teach our children to live the faith;
we are giving ourselves away through our social ministries by
serving at the Stoughton Clothing Center,
serving a meal at St. Mark’s,
and moving toward opening an Adult Day Program.

Jesus calls us into abundant life now,
a life that is given to us new each day.
We receive that gift in the practices of life together—
whenever we devote ourselves to hearing God’s word,
to fellowship, to eating and drinking and praying together.
We receive that gift day by day, in practices of gratitude.
We have all that we need,
and when we know that deep down,
we become people with glad and generous hearts.

Jesus says, I am the gate.
Jesus is the Gate who excludes no one,
calls each of us by name,
and offers abundant life.

Thanks be to God.
Amen.