

## The Fourth Sunday of Easter

### Principal Service readings

Acts 2.42-47	Growth of the early Christian community
Psalm 23	The Lord is my shepherd
1 Peter 2.19-25	Having gone astray you have returned to the shepherd of your souls
John 10.1-10	Jesus, the gate to the sheepfold

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### Gospel Reading

#### *Jesus, the gate to the sheepfold*

Jesus said to the Pharisees: "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. <sup>2</sup>The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' <sup>6</sup>Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

<sup>7</sup>So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>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 NRSV<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

## Comments and Questions

The phrase is not used in our gospel passage but the idea of the 'good shepherd' comes to most people's minds. It's actually more about 'the gate': Jesus says he is the gate through which the sheep can enter. He keeps out those who wish the sheep harm and keeps the sheep safe. The sheep recognise his voice but not the voice of a stranger. Since they trust him they are willing to follow him.

The fourth gospel never uses the word 'parable', but calls such an illustration a 'figure of speech'. The subtle difference with parables is that he is not saying something like, 'the kingdom of God is like a sheepfold ...', he is saying 'I am the gate', referring to himself in a form of parabolic discourse. It is one of several 'I am' statements that Jesus makes throughout the gospel. Why doesn't Jesus begin his discourse with 'I am the good shepherd', but says rather, 'I am the gate'?

It seems quite down to earth because he is not talking about heaven but about a place of security and safety from the world with its dangers and threats. The threats are still there, but the sheep do not recognise the voice of a stranger; they follow the voice of their protector. Are we perhaps easily led away by other voices clamouring for our attention, or do we refuse to listen and listen instead for the voice of our protector and guide? Let us become more familiar with the gate through whom we enter the sheepfold and not be called away by other voices.

## Quotations

1

It [knowing God] is the most practical project anyone can engage in. Knowing about God is crucially important for living our lives." Packer continues, "Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through this life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you.

J.I. Packer, 1926–

2

Outside of Christ, I am only a sinner, but in Christ, I am saved. Outside of Christ, I am empty; in Christ, I am full. Outside of Christ, I am weak;

in Christ, I am strong. Outside of Christ, I cannot; in Christ, I am more than able. Outside of Christ, I have been defeated; in Christ, I am already victorious. How meaningful are the words, 'in Christ'.

Watchman Nee, 1903–1972

3

To be a Christian who is willing to travel with Christ on his downward road requires being willing to detach oneself constantly from any need to be relevant, and to trust ever more deeply the Word of God.

Henri Nouwen, 1932–1996

## Related topics

*For further study:*

Jesus the Good Shepherd; paschal mystery; christology; baptism; conversion, church; symbols: cross, community, light/fire/water, oil, garment, bread, wine; sacraments

## Closing Prayer

O God,  
you never cease to call even those far away,  
for it is your will  
that all be drawn into one fold.

Attune our ears to the voice of the Good Shepherd,  
who leads us always to you,  
that we may find under your tender protection  
life in all its fullness.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, the resurrection and the life,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers<sup>2</sup>

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2 *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999,