

## THE DOOR

A SERMON FOR EASTERTIDE  
SUNDAY MAY 11, 2014  
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
MARIANNA, FLORIDA  
TED W. LAND, INTERIM PASTOR

JOHN 10:1-10

Of all the “I am’s” in the New Testament, all those things that Jesus said He was, and all those wonderful examples and images, the one I’ve preached on the least in forty-five years of preaching is the one we look at this morning: Jesus said, “I am the door...” Now some translations say “the gate”. But I like the door.

A sheepfold, in the days of Jesus, really didn’t have a gate in the way we might think of a gate today. A sheepfold wasn’t a pen, or a corral, it was a shelter, like a barn or a shed. In that rocky and barren land the sheepfold was most often constructed of the materials on hand: rocks. Piled on top of each other, with a roof that might be either brush or sod, the sheepfold was a place to keep the sheep dry on a rainy night, warm from their collective body heat on a cold night.

The opening might be closed with a large stone rolled into the gap left in the wall. Or it might be closed with a wooden door, or gate, that held the sheep in. But most commonly, the sheepfolds out in the rugged hill country didn’t use a wood gate or door. If they had any wood, they burned it to keep warm or as a cooking fire.

It was not unusual for the wandering shepherds in the hills of Israel to arrive at a sheepfold at the same time. And so their flocks would be comingled in the fold.

It would be dark, crowded, smelly, in that sheepfold. And it is hard to tell one sheep from another. Pity the poor shepherd who had to go into the sheepfold, and separate his sheep from the other flock or two or three that might have spent the night in the sheepfold.

And so the sheep learned to recognize the voice of the shepherd. He could stand outside the sheepfold, and utter his cry, his sheep call, and his sheep would come out of the sheepfold and follow him to the green pastures and the still waters of the day.

Remember Eddie Arnold’s big hit of sixty years ago, “Cattle Call”? Most every cattleman has a call that he uses to bring his cows in. I have one that I use, and my herd of twenty or so cows will come when I call them. It is fun to watch them come, the little calves gamboling and playing, the mama cows coming at a brisk trot, then breaking into a stately canter, and the bull strolling leisurely behind. They come to be fed, to be given a treat, a cow cookie. Polly doesn’t need a cattle call to bring them in. She can just walk out there and rattle the bucket, and here they come.

Those cows come in because they know when they do, they are going to be fed.

The sheep came out of the sheepfold in response to the call of the shepherd for the same reason. They knew their shepherd would feed them, would take them to where there was grass to graze and water to drink, and that their shepherd would care for them, protecting them from whatever might assail them, from wolves, and bears, and lions, and wild dogs, and, yes, even from thieves and robbers.

It was not unusual at the time of Jesus for the shepherd to sleep in the doorway of the sheepfold. Thus, he literally did become the door of the sheep. If someone wanted to steal his sheep, he would have to come through the shepherd to do it.

So the thief did not enter through the door. The thief came in by breaking a hole in the wall, rolling a rock out of its place. Or maybe he dug a hole through the sod roof, and reached in and grabbed a lamb or two, lifting them out through the roof.

It was the shepherd who was both the door that kept the sheep safe, and the doorway through which they came in and out.

One can't listen to these words of Jesus without remembering the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Nor can I read them without remembering a phrase from another favorite Psalm, the 121<sup>st</sup>, which tells us that the Lord shall preserve our going out and our coming in from this time forth and even forevermore.

Jesus is the door. It is through Him that we enter the kingdom of God. It is He who stands as a barrier, indeed, a barricade, between us and evil, between us and harm. That doesn't mean that evil can't tempt us, that nothing can harm us. It just means that it has to go through Jesus to get to us, unless we open the door.

But there is another image of a door that comes to my mind this morning.

It is from the Book of Revelation, 3:20, where Jesus says, "I stand at the door and knock, and if anyone hears my voice, I will come in and sit down to supper with Him, and he with Me.

The church in which I spent the first two decades of my life, the Little Brick Presbyterian Church, formerly the Little Gray Mission, had beautiful stained glass windows. The building is now the Greater Ebenezer Baptist Church, and Martin Luther King, Sr., "Daddy" King, spoke at the "re-consecration" service, and in his sermon that evening, he admired the windows.

One of those windows was the classic Good Shepherd window. The other was the image of Jesus standing at the door knocking. In that classic painting, the door is made of thick, wide, wooden planks, bound with iron, with iron hinges. But there is no keyhole, no door knob, not even a ring that could be pulled to open the door, on the outside. The only way the door can be opened is from the inside. That door represents the heart: each of us alone can open our hearts to Jesus.

Do you remember the old hymn based on the text, and probably the painting?

The lyric goes like this:

O Jesus, Thou art standing, outside the fast closed door.  
In lowly patience waiting to pass the threshold o'er;  
Shame on us, Christian brothers, His name and sign who bear,  
O Shame, thrice shame, upon us, to keep Him standing there.

O Jesus, thou art knocking, and lo, that hand is scarred,  
And thorns Thy brow encircle, and tears Thy face have marred;  
O love that passeth knowledge, so patiently to wait!  
O sin that hath no equal, so fast to bar the gate!

O Jesus, Thou art pleading, in accents meek and low,  
"I died for you, My children, and will you treat Me so?"  
O Lord, with shame and sorrow we open now the door;  
Dear Savior, enter, enter, and leave us nevermore.

Now: the one who is the shepherd of the sheep calls us to follow Him, and those who are His sheep know His voice, and will follow Him. And He becomes the door through which we enter His kingdom, and the door which keeps us safe and secure.

But in order to become one of His sheep, we must open that other door, the door to our hearts.

May our prayer be, "Dear savior, enter, enter, and leave us nevermore." Amen and amen.