



Sermon, July 17, 2016
Rev. Dr. Craig S. Pesti-Strobel
Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

Sermon Series: Come Meet Jesus
"The Gate and the Shepherd's Voice"

Scripture: John 10:1-21

10:1 "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. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

7 So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

19 Again the Jews were divided because of these words. 20 Many of them were saying, "He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?" 21 Others were saying, "These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

The Gate:

George Adam Smith, the 19th century biblical scholar tells of traveling one day in the holy land and coming across a shepherd and his sheep. He fell into conversation with him and the man showed him the fold into which the sheep were led at night. It consisted of four walls, with a way in. Smith asked him, "This is where they go at night?"

“The Gate and the Shepherd’s Voice”

“Yes,” said the shepherd, “and when they are in there, they are perfectly safe.”

“But there is no door,” said Smith.

“I am the door,” said the shepherd. He was not a Christian man and wasn’t speaking in the language of the New Testament. He was speaking from an Arab shepherd’s viewpoint. Smith looked at him and asked, “What do you mean you are the door?”

“When the light has gone,” said the shepherd, “and all the sheep are inside, I lie in that open space, and no sheep ever goes out but across my body, and no wolf comes in unless he crosses my body; I am the door.”

Jesus grew up and lived in a culture that was a mix of ancient traditional lifestyles and the development of Roman-style cities and urban economies. But everyone needed to eat, so sheep and goats were still raised and grazed the way they had for centuries. Shepherds still took care of their flocks out in the countryside, bringing them into the safety of sheepfolds at night. Adam Smith’s encounter illustrates how little that particular aspect of life has changed.

Twenty years ago, I traveled to Germany to a small village called Villigst to teach class on using drama to interpret scripture to a group of students involved with the Evangelisches Studienwerk. We all stayed at what had formerly been a manor house, and it had fields and a small pasturage next to it on which a small herd of sheep grazed. I would watch the sheep graze from time to time as I walked the grounds, and I observed how they ignored me when I walked by, but as soon as their shepherd came near and he called to them, they recognized his voice and would go to him. He would open the gate to their enclosure, and walked alongside him as he led them to another area to graze.

They recognized his voice. I’ve known of people who save their voicemail messages just to hear the voice of the ones they love. It is in the Gospel of John that we have the story of Mary encountering the resurrected Jesus in the garden, but she supposes him to be the gardener. But as soon as he speaks her name, she recognizes him. She knew his voice. An intimacy of relationship... She was known deeply by Jesus. He

“The Gate and the Shepherd’s Voice”

knew her as a person, as a whole person, deeply, intimately. (Intimate is misused these days to connote sexual relationship. Not what I mean).

Community response: What do you think it means to know someone deeply and intimately?

Familiarity and intimacy are not the same. Each has a value in life, certainly in married life, but one is no substitute for the other. If one is confused for the other, we have the basis for major human and marital unrest. In marriage, familiarity is inescapable. It happens almost imperceptibly. Intimacy is usually hard to come by. It must be deliberately sought and opened up and responded to. Familiarity brings a degree of ease and comfort. *Intimacy anxiously searches for deep understanding and personal appreciation.* (Gordon Lester, *Homemade*, Vol. 4, No. 11.)

Intimacy requires closeness and openness to one another. The University of Northern Iowa once offered a general art course that included a most unusual exercise. The teacher brought to class a shopping bag filled with lemons and gave a lemon to each class member. The assignment was for the student to keep his lemon with him day and night—smelling, handling, examining it. Next class period, without warning, students were told to put their lemons back in the bag. Then each was asked to find his lemon. Surprisingly, most did so without difficulty. (*Ministry*, September, 1984.)

Look again at the image on the cover of the bulletin. The shepherd is cradling the lamb close to his face. He can feel the wool brush against his face, smell the lanolin and dirt, sense the quivering of the lamb’s flanks, hear the lamb pant, sense the beating of it’s heart. That is intimacy. When you get that close to someone, when spend time with them, you get to know them.

Let me tell you a true story that illustrates how important it is to be known and understood deeply by others. Years ago Father John Powell told the story of Norma Jean Mortenson: "Norma Jean Mortenson. Remember that name? Norma Jean's mother, Mrs. Gladys Baker, was periodically committed to a mental institution and Norma Jean spent much of her

"The Gate and the Shepherd's Voice"

childhood in foster homes. In one of those foster homes, when she was eight years old, one of the boarders raped her and gave her a nickel.

He said, 'Here, Honey. Take this and don't ever tell anyone what I did to you.' When little Norma Jean went to her foster mother to tell her what had happened she was beaten badly. She was told, 'Our boarder pays good rent. Don't you ever say anything bad about him!' Norma Jean at the age of eight had learned what it was to be used and given a nickel and beaten for trying to express the hurt that was in her.

"Norma Jean turned into a very pretty young girl and people began to notice. Boys whistled at her and she began to enjoy that, but she always wished they would notice she was a person too—not just a body—or a pretty face—but a person.

"Then Norma Jean went to Hollywood and took a new name—Marilyn Monroe and the publicity people told her, 'We are going to create a modern sex symbol out of you.' And this was her reaction, 'A symbol? Aren't symbols things people hit together?'

They said, 'Honey, it doesn't matter, because we are going to make you the most smoldering sex symbol that ever hit the celluloid.'

"She was an overnight smash success, but she kept asking, 'Did you also notice I am a person? Would you please notice?' Then she was cast in the dumb blonde roles.

"Everyone hated Marilyn Monroe. Everyone did.

"She would keep her crews waiting two hours on the set. She was regarded as a selfish prima donna. What they didn't know was that she was in her dressing room vomiting because she was so terrified.

"She kept saying, 'Will someone please notice I am a person. Please.' They didn't notice. They wouldn't take her seriously." She went through three marriages—always pleading, 'Take me seriously as a person.' Everyone kept saying, 'But you are a sex symbol. You can't be other than that.'

"The Gate and the Shepherd's Voice"

"Marilyn kept saying 'I want to be a person. I want to be a serious actress.' And so on that Saturday night, at the age of 35 when all beautiful women are supposed to be on the arm of a handsome escort, Marilyn Monroe took her own life. She killed herself." When her maid found her body the next morning, she noticed the telephone was off the hook. It was dangling there beside her.

Later investigation revealed that in the last moments of her life she had called a Hollywood actor and told him she had taken enough sleeping pills to kill herself.

"He answered with the famous line of Rhett Butler, which I now edit for church, 'Frankly, my dear, I don't care!' That was the last word she heard. She dropped the phone—left it dangling." Claire Booth Luce in a very sensitive article asked, 'What really killed Marilyn Monroe, love goddess who never found any love?' She said she thought the dangling telephone was the symbol of Marilyn Monroe's whole life. She died because she never got through to anyone who understood. (*Dynamic Preaching*, June, 1990.)

Jesus speaks to us that we might not die, but live. Jesus came that we might have life and have it abundantly. But that life come from hearing the voice of the One who wishes to know us deeply, who speaks our name in whatever garden of grief or pain in which we might wander. Jesus wishes to hold us closely, like the shepherd nuzzling the lamb. Ultimately, the Christian way is not about believing in this or that doctrine. Ultimately it is about relationship. It is about our relationships with one another, about how we treat one another, and how we know and care for one another. And it is about our relationship with God, with Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit.

Are there any dangling telephones in your life? Are there people for whom your voice might bring them life? Is God dialing your number but only getting a busy signal?

For God's sake - for your sake - pick up the phone.

Reach out and touch somebody.