

Jesus is the Shepherd and the Gate John 10:1-10

In the passage from John's Gospel, it appears that Jesus is describing himself as both the shepherd of the sheep and the gate to the sheepfold. In fact, he is describing himself that way. We might find ourselves wondering how he can be both. It is important for us to remember that this teaching follows an incredible and important event. That event was the healing of the blind man. If we look at what happened in that event then we can truly see how Jesus is both the shepherd and the gate.

We all know that one of the major responsibilities of a shepherd is to take care of each sheep in his flock. He not only leads them to fresh water and good pastures, he is also the protector and the healer. If a sheep gets hurt, the shepherd does everything in his power to heal that sheep. Because of this caring and compassion of the shepherd, each sheep knows the shepherd's voice. They respond to it.

On Thursday, I was at a meeting with some other clergy. One of them said they were on a tour in the Holy Land. They had stopped to rest at a water hole outside Jerusalem. Suddenly, four different shepherds came to the watering hole with their four flocks of sheep. Of course, all the sheep were all mixed together trying to get to the water. The guide told the group that when a shepherd believed his sheep had gotten their water, he would walk up the road a short way and call back to the mass of sheep. Upon hearing his voice, his sheep would come to them and they would then move on following the shepherd.

In the story of the blind man, Jesus is with his disciples when he sees the man. The disciples ask him who sinned that the man was born blind. Jesus responds that he was not blind due to sin, but that the work of God might be displayed in his life. Jesus then goes to the man. Like a shepherd would go to a hurting sheep, Jesus goes to the blind man. He places the mud that he makes on the man's eyes and tells him to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. The man hears Jesus and listens to his voice. Upon washing away the mud, he finds that he can see. Jesus is the good shepherd who has taken care of one of his flock.

However, we also know that when the man returned he was questioned about his healing. Those who questioned him were the Pharisees. They didn't want to believe in the miracle. They even called for his parents to discredit the man. We also have to remember that these Pharisees knew of this man's illness. They considered themselves the leaders and the teachers of the people. And yet, they didn't do anything to help this man in his illness. In fact, they turned away from him. Where is the mercy they claim to teach about from God? They are not the shepherds of God's people. They are more like the robbers and thieves Jesus describes in the 10th chapter. Once again we see by their inaction how Jesus is the good shepherd.

Even though Jesus is trying to teach them they don't understand. They don't see him as the good shepherd because they don't believe in the healing that he accomplished. Jesus can tell they don't understand. So he tells them he is also the gate for the sheep. The sheep that belong to him, the people who listen to him, can pass through and will be saved. They will move through the gate and find pasture and receive life, a full life.

How does this relate to the story of the blind man? After being extensively questioned by the Pharisees the once blind man is thrown out. He will forever be shunned by these leaders of the people. Upon hearing that he was thrown out, Jesus goes and finds the man like the good shepherd seeking one of his

flock. When Jesus finds him, he asks the man one question, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The man's reply is to ask Jesus to tell him who that person is so that he could believe in him. Jesus tells him that it is he. The man's immediate response is to believe and to worship Jesus. The man is not only physically cured of blindness, he is given spiritual eyes that acknowledge and worship Jesus as the Messiah. He sees Jesus for who he truly is and believes. Through Jesus, the gate, he now has eternal life. While he will still live in this world for a while, his life is now every different. He has received the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now, we can see how the teaching has followed the story of the healing of the blind man. Jesus is indeed the good shepherd and the gate to eternal life. Now that we know Jesus is the good shepherd and the gate to eternal life what is our response to him? I have often heard in the church that we are to continually seek for God. However, from the story of the blind man we learned that Jesus went to him, not once but twice. It isn't so much that we have to go find Jesus. Jesus comes to us. We have to acknowledge that he is present. Jesus asks each one of us the same question that he asked the blind man, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Our answer to that question places us in one of two categories. Acknowledging Jesus as the Son of Man removes the spiritual blinders and opens to us the gate to eternal life. We find ourselves in the company of the once blind man. To not acknowledge Jesus as the Son of Man places us in the same camp as the Pharisees. They were so spiritually blind that they couldn't even celebrate the good fortune of the man who was healed. They believed they knew all about God already. God was going to save them because of who they were. They were important in their own minds.

And yet, God doesn't want or need us to be important in our own minds. God wants us to acknowledge our need for God's presence in our lives. It is indeed being humble enough to know that we need the healing Jesus provides in our lives. IT is the type of healing that only God can bring. We definitely can't do it by ourselves. Only God can provide the spiritual healing that indeed opens our eyes to God's presence in Jesus Christ our Lord. He is the good shepherd that cares for the sheep. We are the sheep. With Jesus as the shepherd and the gate we have absolutely nothing to fear. No matter what the world might throw at us our life with God will always be secure. All we have to do is listen to the voice of Jesus and follow where he leads.

Amen