

September 1, 2019

"I am the..."

"...I am the gate for the sheep. All whoever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10:1-10



Growing up I spent a bit of time on my uncle's ranch with my cousins. One thing I learned early was that any gate you opened you were supposed to close. I also learned that not every gate I opened was all that easy to close, but regardless every gate you opened had to be closed.

Of course there is a reason for that. Gates, even in a fence around a yard here in town, serve a purpose. They are designed to keep certain things in and other things out. On a ranch the cows or horses or goats or whatever are supposed to be in the pasture or corral where you put them. If you finally get them all where they belong and some lame-brained dude kid comes along and leaves the gate opened the cows or horses or goats or whatever are going to get out and go where they want to go which is seldom a good thing.

So, on a ranch, the gates to pastures and corrals must be kept closed to keep the animals inside, inside. Of course, the gates are also intended to keep certain things out. Sometimes we keep the gates shut to keep the cows or horses or goats or whatever out of someplace we don't want them to be...like The garden.

Jesus tells us in our context for today that he wants to be our gate. ***"I am the gate for the sheep..."*** he says, ***"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."*** In the Jewish culture of Jesus' day almost every family had at least a few sheep. In the winter months particularly, the village sheep would all be kept together in a pen or corral called a fold at night. As the evening approached all of the shepherds from the community would bring their sheep together to the fold and they would pass through the gate into safety.

A guard would be posted on that gate all night to protect those sheep and in the morning the shepherds would all come to the gate to lead their sheep out to pasture for the day. The gate-

keeper who was sometimes, literally the gate, was a very important person. The whole community trusted him to do his job; to protect the sheep at all costs and to make sure that only the appropriate shepherds could access them.

His job was to protect the sheep from whatever or whoever might try to hurt or kill them and he was expected to go so far as to lay down his life to do his job. He had to protect the sheep at all costs. The only way into or out of the fold was through the gate.

Jesus says, ***"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved..."*** Our Lord has provided us with a safe place to shelter from the darkness that is this world. He calls us to come into his fold, his safe haven, and he promises to be our gate. We can only come into that safe haven through him. There is no other entrance. He is our gate and once we have entered through him nothing and no one can get to us or hurt us.

The thing about gates is that those who are brought in through that gate sometimes try to find a way out. Thieves and robbers try to get into the fold by some other means and the gate, or gate-keeper is there to see that they don't. Sadly though, there are always those among us who rebel against the safe haven and who insist on finding a way out, a way to get past the gate.

Jesus offers us the safe haven of his fold, his pasture. He is the gate who will let us in and keep us safe if we will let him. Sadly, some of us will not go through the gate. Some of us will try to escape the safety of the fold. Some of us will insist on getting out so that we can go on getting into trouble. Jesus is the gate, but going through that gate is still our choice. What will we choose?