

April 30, 2023: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Fourth Sunday of Easter ~

“Christ calls His sheep by their name.”

Our services can be found on our website at www.barrechurch.com

Scripture Reading: John 10 v 1-10

1. Introduction:

When we enter our homes, close our doors and windows, we hope and believe that we will be safe and protected. There is peace of mind that all is well, and we come and go, knowing that those who enter are in fact the ones who belong in that house. There is comfort and protection. It is not always the case though, that being behind closed or locked doors is enough to give us safety. Some of us may have experienced burglaries or heard of others who have gone through such a terrible experience. The news is full of such awful experiences and the impact on people's lives.

2. The gate, and the enemies

In this passage we read how Jesus introduces the sheep in their sheep pen, which was a secure and protective environment for them, with a watchman standing guard at the gate. Anyone who would not use the door to the pen, would be called a thief and a robber, coming to steal, kill and destroy the sheep. To be an authentic shepherd to the sheep, that person would enter through the gate and the sheep would recognize their voice, trust them, and follow where they were leading them. Crucial to this story is the voice of the Eastern shepherd, who had an individual call for each sheep, and the sheep would recognize the voice of the shepherd, calling them. The sheep would not follow a stranger, because they did not recognize the voice of that stranger.

Then Jesus goes on to tell His listeners that He is the gate for the sheep, and anyone who came before Him, are thieves and robbers, who do not have the interest of protecting the sheep but were there for their own interest and wellbeing. He was talking about the religious leaders of the establishment of the time, who did not care for the poor and the

needy. He introduces this parable right after the episode in Chapter 9 with the blind man, whom He healed, and who then was ousted by the Pharisees at the temple. They did not care what happened to this man, and when He was healed, instead of rejoicing with him, treated him like an outcast. They were, in His eyes, the thieves and the robbers stealing the lives of people, because they did not care for them. And so, He is the gate for His sheep, and anyone who comes through Him will be protected and saved and find pasture. They will have a fulfilled and blessed life, because of Him.

3. The Good Shepherd:

This passage also falls within the broader scope of this chapter, where Jesus describes Himself as the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep, and they know Him. He knows the name of every sheep, and He calls them by their name, and they listen and follow Him. He is the Good Shepherd to those who were poor, and sick and left to beg on the streets by the religious leaders of His time. They were left to suffer, and their lives were squeezed out of them by the ones who were supposed to care for them. Harsh words by Jesus... And then, when He came to heal them and feed them, His ministry and leadership were seen as a threat, and He was hated and crucified. Important is that He, the Good Shepherd saw the pain and suffering and did something about it.

For Jesus to identify Himself as the gate of the sheep pen, and the Good Shepherd also meant that He is the One sent by God to bring salvation to the lost souls of this world. He offers a full life to those who acknowledge Him as their savior. This contrasts with what the people are experiencing under the leadership of the establishment, those who lack the care and compassion and spiritual comfort to the ones who need it. Jesus, on the other hand, brings physical and spiritual comfort to them. His presence changed the lives of those around them.

4. Conclusion:

Jesus' disclosure to the Pharisees and others about being the gate and the Good Shepherd, is His proclamation about God's love for humanity. God does not select who is worthy and not worthy of being brought into the sheep pen, so to speak. God wants every human soul to be saved, and to experience the glory of God through the Son, Jesus Christ. God also

wants their lives to be healed from illness and poverty and suffering, and all humanity to experience fulfilment in their lives... to live life to the fullest. Jesus as the gate is both the access to God for the salvation of humanity, and as the Good Shepherd, is there for every human being to feel cared for and protected.

God's mercy, I believe, is so wide and deep, and so mysterious. God is patient with all of us, and God's ways for salvation is both specific, giving us Christ to lead us there, and so wide that only God knows the path of every sheep. God calls us by our name, and we listen and hear God's voice when our spirits are awakened, and we turn away from our lives as we know it and turn to God as God wants us to know and experience it. God's saving grace is for the whole of humanity, so we all can go into the sheep pen, protected from the enemy and the robber, and to experience the fullest of blessings from God.

As children of God, we are called to be there for those whose lives are not always protected by forces outside their control. God wants our lives to be living testimonies of the love and care and compassion God has for us, and to go and do the same to others. May God bless this message to each one of our lives. Amen