

“The Jesus Gate”
Psalm 23; John 10:1-10
Rev.Rebecca Simpson
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Let's pray.

Gracious God, we thank you for this time together to consider your word in our lives we pray that by the power of your Holy Spirit our understanding would grow our faith would deepen, and our compassion would overflow, in Christ Jesus we pray, Amen!

In today's scripture passage of John 10 Jesus tells a group of Pharisees that he as the Good Shepherd will bring the sheep to the fullness of life. As those who seek Jesus' destruction these particular Pharisees are blind to his lessons and they fail to comprehend or accept that he is the Messiah, the one sent from God who will lead the people of God so loves to salvation.

The Pharisees in question are the religious elite. Whose values are skewed an hearts are hardened toward God hardened toward the community that they were in charge of leading and caring for. They were not being good shepherds. This group of leaders have failed, but God intervenes. As God always does this time in Jesus Christ, the capital 'G' Good Shepherd, and he will not fail.

Jesus the Good Shepherd will guide God's flock to life abundant. Now let's be careful here we can be tempted to look down on these particular Pharisees and I say 'particular' for surely not all who followed the pharisaic school of thought were so stubborn, blind, and even violent as those highlighted in John's gospel. Before we look with judgment on these religious leaders it would do us well to reflect on our own leadership of God's people over the decades as the church, those in and out of the church.

We might have at times echoed the black and white thinking the self-protection of these adversaries to Jesus. How have we fallen to the temptation to define who is in and who is out in this world, at work, in our families, in our churches. How have we ended up missing the presence of our Savior.

The richness of God's Holy scriptures demands that we inhabit every stance within the stories of Jesus. Step into the situation from each point of view offered and wonder about what we have in common as individuals and as a group. How are we similar to the Pharisees in question? How are we different? What could we learn? We can learn so much about ourselves and our role in God's Kingdom when we use the holy scriptures in this way.

In today's passage Jesus describes himself as shepherd and then as the gate through which the sheep must pass to come into the sheepfold. And again in the next passage he will be the Good Shepherd who lays his life down for the sheep. He most definitely mixes his metaphors. He is the shepherd, He is the gate. But instead of trying to confuse us these images layer upon each other to produce a richness that evades our drive to explain things too plainly.

If you're not if you get stuck at sorting the metaphors you have missed the point. As the shepherd Jesus has a relationship with his sheep. A relationship of protection and provision his sheep know his voice they follow him, they trust him. He calls them by name and they recognize him just as the distraught Mary Magdalene will recognize the risen Jesus outside the empty tomb upon hearing him call her name on Easter morning.

The shepherd leads his followers in the way of abundant life. Protecting them from thieves and robbers who only wish to steal and kill and destroy. These oppositional Pharisees the ones who are supposed to know, educated in the law and in the prophets, organized to guide God's people in a goodly life of 'Shalom' they are supposed to know, and they don't. But followers of Jesus understand who he is. They do know, they listen to him, they know his voice.

And Jesus also says he is the gate, as the gate there is an exclusivity about Jesus Christ. Elsewhere in the gospel of John Jesus proclaims that he is the way, the truth, and the life, capitalized. A follower of Jesus can be certain that following him will reveal truth, will provide a goodly way to navigate the world away that brings life. The flock who passes through the Jesus gate will be brought to still waters, will be led safely through the valley of death, into eternal life.

Through the Jesus gate one will confidently find the way of life in relationship with God. Thief's and robbers will try to sneak into the sheepfold sniffing around the fence looking for a way in, but the gate is locked against them. They shall not be able to harm the sheep. The Jesus gate both protects the sheep from destruction and opens wide to them a vivid way toward goodness and wholeness.

Jesus as the gate calls our theological imagination to consider place. If Jesus is the gate where are we in relation to that gate? Are we safe inside the sheep pen? shielded from thieves and robbers who sneak, seek to destroy and kill? Are we tentatively walking through the gate for the first time beginning a relationship with Jesus and wondering what the other side will demand of us?

Are we confident of the sheep pen but tentative about the daily path on the outside? How we might invite others to join us? What we might find out in the world is Jesus coming with us. The Jesus gate presents us with a threshold of great significance. Thresholds are that thin area between one place and the next. We pass through them quickly without noticing all the time. Thresholds are places of opportunity. Upon a threshold we can pause to consider where we've been, where we are, and where we're going.

So let's do that let's pause in the Jesus gate and consider where we are where have you been going lately? Are you out in a world that has lost all sense none of us really know what the next few months or even the next year will bring. Navigating out of a pandemic has brought us onto an unmarked path. Remarkable shifts and how we live in the world because of economic hardship in global warming have yet to fully reveal themselves. The way we relate to the land and to the indigenous people of this land is still healing. We are God's people in the threshold of the Jesus gate. Where are we headed?

You as Richmond Presbyterian, you are on an incredible threshold right now. As a community of faith you are about to receive a new minister a new teaching elder is coming to help shepherd you on the path ahead for you as a community. Before you rush to explore the path ahead too quickly I invite you to pause in the Jesus gate. Stop in the safe place of Jesus and take a look around, behind you, ahead of you.

Consider the opportunity this threshold in time might be offering you. It's very interesting to check into how many times the New Testament scriptures seem to be addressing a singular 'you' mean Jesus your personal relationship of just 'you' and and Christ where are 'you' in relation to the Jesus gate and the plural 'you' all y'all, all of you.

Often in the New Testament the 'you' is a communal. 'You' it's a group, it's the church 'You' Richmond Presbyterian. The image of the Jesus gate as threshold to pause in is significant for both you and you. For individuals we might ask about this this threshold time of heading back into the world. What's ours to pick up and do a game. What's better left behind for you as a group what is Jesus really calling you to do and be as a congregation, as his holy body, as his faithful witnesses to his resurrection in the world of today what are you being called to do here in this community?

It isn't news that many aspects of Canadian church life together are no longer feasible. So what is? Take this precious time to stand in the provision and protection of the Jesus gate together with your new minister and look out at the world and ask what do you see where is God out ahead of you in your community?

I urge you not to hurry too quickly into busy work again. Don't over subscribe yourselves in ways that will make you too warm to be present to each other and to those who haven't passed through the Jesus gate yet. In Christ we know mercy and grace, endless love. That's the one thing in this ever changing world that has not changed that will not ever change. So what do we do in this precious with this precious message that in Christ we belong at this precious time when so many have lost their way and are looking for a safe place to settle in and have a goodly life.

I'm a visitor I don't know Richmond Presbyterian, but God does. So let's start with asking and praying and waiting on the Holy Spirits promptings. Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord. We will wait upon the Lord. Some of you might know that lyric will rise as we wait upon the

Lord we will wait upon the Lord strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord we will wait upon the Lord.

It's one that pops into my head often it's a quote from Isaiah a variation from Isaiah chapter 40 from a time when God's community of faith was worn and weary exiled from their homeland and oppressed by a foreign power I can't really tell this story again with enough emphasis just how hopeless God's people were in that time, to the point of forgetting their own identity.

And these words come from God through the prophet Isaiah 'strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord'. I know that song from camp Douglas place near and dear to your new minister Curtis Bablitz, his wife Skittles Johanna. A place near and dear to me. Curtis is actually the person who recruited me to be the new Camp Director 14 years ago when we were graduating from VST.

He introduced me to that place where God's love flows in abundance into the hearts and minds of children and young adults. And now I convene the camp Douglas committee and we've been waiting on the Lord for many years for two big things.

Ever since I started serving the ministry at camp Douglas part time, I saw the need for a full time director dedicated to growing the ministry. The part time was just enough to keep it going, not enough to attend to things that would help it to grow. I had a dream to see the ministry at camp Douglas become a full time ministry. But we never had the money. We always had just enough but not more than enough. The pandemic came and that put us into quite a strange place of pause, as you can imagine.

I think church isn't as fun or resume try summer camp it's just not the same. As a camp committee we tried some creative things and some work better than others and we had very faithful donors and committed leaders who stuck with us and then we received a gift, one gift from one person from the estate of Patricia Boyd a woman most of us had never met but she gave nearly \$300,000 from her estate to camp Douglas. In the middle of the dry desert of pandemic we received a gift of abundance.

Just enough for us to imagine calling a full time director for three years. One thing we were waiting for, and it came. What's the second thing? Who that director would be? As we looked at all of the camping BC camping association postings, it was a remarkable number of summer camps that are looking for a new director after the pandemic. We put the word out to our presbytery at why did none of you apply? We literally got zero applications.

We met one person who had been passed associated with the camp who expressed some interest and in conversation we realized it wasn't going to work. We waited upon the Lord Dale Woods was very helpful he reminded us the worst mistake we would make is to hire the wrong person and to be patient and wait and so we as the camp committee made plans for how we would be the director in the absence of a director for this coming summer and we shared the word we're looking for a camp director do you know anyone do you know anyone do you know anyone and lo and behold we had an expression of interest from a woman who lives in

Vancouver Island, was born and bred in the UK in Wales, and has a bachelor degree in Christian youth work.

She's in her mid-30s married bubbly she describes herself as a people person, and she's been working in church settings all her life and she wants to get back to working with youth. She has a beautiful sense of what evangelism looks like and myself having children between the age of 18 and 21 and knowing what their struggle is for understanding their faith in this current post-Christian world I could see this woman ministering to my children in ways I had barely dreamed were possible. Her name is Lucy Rosenberg and she is our new Camp Director.

If 20 people had applied, sorry I didn't think I'd be emotional if 20 people had applied she would have risen head and shoulders above every single one of them. And I am someone who meets a lot of wonderful young Christian leaders working a VST. So, strength will rise as you wait upon the Lord.

I shared that with you this morning because I think we have good news to tell in the church. Sometimes we wait a long time to be able to tell that good news. I don't know how many times I wanted to quit working for the camp committee but it was someone I knew who put me in touch with Lucy.

I stayed for a reason it's I'm not the hero of this story God is the hero of this story. Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord. Don't rush through the gate too quickly. It's OK pausing, and standing in the threshold until the path forward is a little more clear. Jesus has got your back. He's there with you in that place in that waiting.

These are days of threshold for all of us. We stand at the edge of an opening to what is next. Desiring what we were used to, we peer through the doorway hoping for a restoration of what was. Yeah what will be is obscured from our view. I encourage you as you pause at this threshold time in your morning prayers imagine standing in the provision and protection of the Jesus gate looking out, toward the Jesus way listening for the voice of the Good Shepherd who is ready to lead you on a path of life that holds truth and abundance of joy and a fullness of hope.

What is Jesus voice calling you to attend to, in your personal life the previously you could avoid because you were too busy or if you are too busy now what is Jesus voice calling you to put down so he can carry it for you.

In your evening prayers imagine standing in the Jesus gate heading into the protection and the rest of the sheepfold. The protection and rest is Jesus offering you he promises an abundance of peace and comfort are waiting inside can you accept it? In these days of threshold opportunity for new life is all around. Listen for the voice of the one who calls you by name and trust in him.

Amen!