

Fourth Sunday of Easter

'I am the good shepherd,
says the Lord: I know my
sheep, and mine know me'

—gospel acclamation (John 1: 14)

BE STILL

- Light a candle as a reminder of Christ's presence.
- Take a moment to allow whatever is in your heart to rise, and offer your thoughts to the loving care of the Lord.

SING OR LISTEN

'[The Lord's my shepherd](#)' or '[Shepherd me, O God](#)'.

GATHERING PRAYER

Risen Lord Jesus,
Go ahead of us now.
Be the way for us into true freedom and abundance of life.
Amen.

GOSPEL

A reading from the gospel according to John:

Jesus said:

'I tell you most solemnly, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the gate, but gets in some other way is a thief and a brigand. The one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; the gatekeeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out. When he has brought out his flock, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice. They never follow a stranger but run away from him: they do not recognise the voice of strangers.'

Jesus told them this parable but they failed to understand what he meant by telling it to them.

So Jesus spoke to them again:

'I tell you most solemnly,

I am the gate of the sheepfold.

All others who have come

are thieves and brigands;

but the sheep took no notice of them.

I am the gate.

Anyone who enters through me will be safe:

he will go freely in and out

and be sure of finding pasture.

The thief comes

only to steal and kill and destroy.

I have come

so that they may have life and have it to the full.'

—John 10:1-10

The Gospel of the Lord.

PONDER THE WORD

After the first reading, what words or phrases struck you from this passage?

Re-read the gospel. Take a moment of silence to reflect upon how God is speaking through this text. Noting down some responses to the following may assist with reflection:

I think about my life:

- What is God asking me to listen to?
- What does God want me to pay attention to?
- What is God prompting, directing, leading and guiding me to in this reading?

I think about my community and the world:

- What is God asking of us at this time?
- What is God wanting us to attend to in our community and our world?
- What is God prompting, directing, leading and guiding us towards?

**‘To bridge the gap, to bring us within reach
Of your high pasture. Calling us by name,
You lay your body down across the breach,
Yourself the door that opens into home.’**

—from Malcolm Guite, ‘I am the door of the sheepfold’



REFLECT

Where is the gate to God? It is not a metal detector or face scanner that we must pass through in order to gain access to God. The gate to the sheepfold is Jesus, the risen Lord. It is through this gate that we can also participate in the divinity of God. This is an encouraging thought: that the sheepfold to which we belong—the church—has such a strong doorkeeper.

Another aspect of our life in God’s sheepfold is our free choice to be here. The famous painting *The Light of the World* by William Holman Hunt shows Jesus with a lantern knocking on a door at night time. The door has no handle on the outside. The story goes that upon completion of the work, someone commented that Hunt had forgotten the handle; to this claim the artist replied that the door can only be opened from the inside. Christ at our door does not force himself on us. God always leaves us free to respond to a divine invitation.

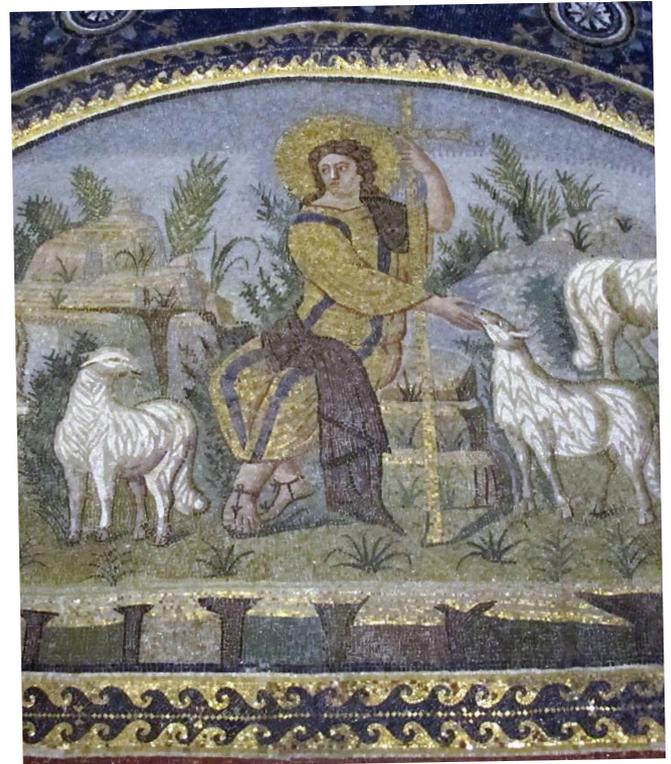
Jesus’ role as gatekeeper to the kingdom of God has several somewhat challenging elements though. He announces to the crowds that entry to God’s sheepfold is given, first, to the broken, the lame, the outcasts and, especially, children. Entrance is not based on wealth, prestige, power or good looks; these values mean little. Indeed, Jesus’ sermons, parables, healings and care for the marginalised were all examples of his gatekeeper code: God raises up the lowly. On the cross, Jesus continued to preach God’s reign, even to a condemned and guilty criminal. The crucified gatekeeper heard the prayer of a thief and promised him that in a very short time, he would inhabit God’s kingdom of peace and paradise. Outcasts are welcomed in Jesus’ fold.

A more unsettling element of this sheepfold vigilance is God’s rejection of certain people: the haughty are rejected; hypocrites don’t get near the door; false witnesses and those who peddle false truths are told there is no room for them in God’s reign. God’s gatekeeper, Jesus, makes no reply to Herod at his trial, his silence powerfully conveying that this evil fox has no place in his sheepfold. We are called as followers of Jesus to share his spirit of strength and power and not to slink into a spirit of timidity (2 Timothy 1:7). We are called to emulate the gatekeeper, strongly denouncing evil when we see it, and bravely declaring that God’s promise stands strong: the humble and meek will inherit the kingdom, and the mighty are cast down from their thrones.

- How can I freely respond to God’s invitation to share a divine life in the sheepfold today?

PRAY

Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd,
Help us to know your voice and respond to your call,
so that we might experience the fullness and freedom
of life in you.
Amen.



Mosaic of the Good Shepherd (c.425),
Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, Italy



THIS WEEK

I will seek to bring new life
and hope to others.

—

I will allow God to surprise me with joy.

—

I will bring my fears and sorrows to Jesus,
trusting them to his tender love.

WEEKLY POCKET PRAYER

**‘If I should walk in the valley of
darkness, no evil would I fear’**

—Psalm 22:4

May the risen Christ bring me peace and
protection in all the dark valleys of my life.

