

4 5-4-20 Good Shepherd

Every 4th Sunday of Easter is Good Shepherd Sunday. Jesus claims to be the Good Shepherd. He says: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Jn 10:11 A few verses later Jesus says: "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me." And, Psalm 23 is a favorite of many, "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want." All these verses are very comforting. Jesus did lay down His life for us. Jesus does know us by name. Jesus will supply us with everything we need.

But, in this Sunday's gospel, Jesus calls Himself "the gate." What does He mean?

This illustration will explain: A Biblical scholar was touring Palestine. He came across a shepherd and his sheep. He fell into conversation with him. The man showed him the fold into which the sheep were led at night. It consisted of four walls, with a way in. The visitor said to him, "That is where they go at night?" "Yes," said the shepherd, "and when they are in there they are perfectly safe." "But there is no gate," said the visitor. "I am the gate," said the shepherd. He was not a Christian so he was not speaking the language of the New Testament. Rather, he was speaking from a Mid-Eastern shepherd's point-of-view. The visitor looked at him and said, "What do you mean you are the gate?" The shepherd said, "When the light has gone, and all the sheep are inside, I lie in that open place, and no sheep ever goes out but across my body, and no wolf comes in unless he crosses my body; I am the gate."

When Jesus says he is the gate, he means he is the one who defends us, his sheep. He is the one who keeps us safe. It means that to get at us, Satan and the other enemies of the church have to cross over Jesus. And, they can't possibly be successful. Jesus Himself promises: "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." Jn 10:28-29

Jesus also points out that He is the only way to life and happiness. Others who try to enter the fold in any other way are thieves and bandits. They do not have the best interest of the sheep in mind. They come to snatch and destroy. All other ways, all other gates, ultimately lead to death. Jesus is the only gate that leads to life in abundance. It's through Jesus alone that our salvation comes. Jesus promises all those entering through him will be saved. This is similar to what he says in John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

We are safe with Jesus. He has conquered death. Anything less than death is conquered by Jesus as well. And He is victorious over anything that threatens to keep us, His sheep, from abundant life.

There is just one little catch, though, that will keep you from sharing abundant life with Jesus. Jesus says: "The Good Shepherd calls his sheep by name, and they follow him because they know him, and will run away from any stranger's voice."

The catch: How well do you know your Shepherd? And, are you following **only** His voice?