



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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Fourth Sunday of Easter

May 7, 2017

“The Door”

(John 10:7-10)

Rev. David K. Groth

“Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly’ (John 10:7-10).

Collect: Almighty God, merciful Father, since You have wakened from death the Shepherd of Your sheep, grant us Your Holy Spirit that when we hear the voice of our Shepherd we may know Him who calls us each by name and follow where He leads; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

In ancient Judea, nomadic shepherds took their sheep wherever grass was to be found, and at night, the shepherd gathered his sheep into a safe place. Shallow caves served well. Shepherds would build a wall of stones partly across the mouth of the cave forming an enclosure. If there was no cave, a palisade, or courtyard surrounded by a low wall of field stones was made. Barbed wire had not yet been invented so prickly shrubs and thorny vines were encouraged to grow on top of the stone walls. Mostly open to the sky, these sheepfolds provided some protection from thieves and predators. A small gap was left in the stone wall where the door was. But the door was not made of wood, or of stones piled high. No . . . it was made of flesh and blood. At night the shepherd simply laid his body across the gap. The shepherd was the door for the sheep. There was no getting in (or out) without going through that living, breathing gate. “I am the door” Jesus said.

It actually works. A number of years ago at the 8th grade confirmation retreat, there were two large dorm rooms with multiple bunk beds in each, and they were connected by a narrow hallway in-between. Boys in one room, girls in the other. I slept on the floor in the gap leading out into the hallway. It actually worked, this idea borrowed from antiquity. No one tried stepping over me. Unfortunately, it didn't prevent the flatulence contest.

“I am the door” Jesus said. “If anyone enters by me, he will be saved.” Do you understand the claim Jesus is making? He alone is the door through whom entrance to God is made possible. He alone is the door by which sinful people get into heaven. In the Greek, it's even more emphatic, placing the emphasis on Jesus as the only door.

“I am the door. By me if anyone enters in he shall be saved.”

That’s quite a claim! Who would say such a thing? And Jesus is not being very careful around our fragile cultural sensitivities here, is he? No, he’s a bull in the china shop, the ultimate iconoclast, shattering our cherished beliefs. “I am the door.” That is, it’s impossible to wiggle into heaven by any other means. Those who would try to bypass him, those who would try to climb the walls into the sheepfold, are thieves and robbers. They are trying to take by force that which has not been given them. They don’t belong there and will be kept out, forcibly.

When he said this, Jesus knew there would be howls of protest not just today, but back then too. Verse 19: “There was again a division among [his listeners] because of these words. Some of them said, ‘He has a demon. Others said he’s insane. Why listen to him?’ Still others said, ‘These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Besides, can a demon open the eyes of the blind?’” So not everyone likes this passage, now or then.

But it wasn’t an accidental irregularity. No, it was part of a consistent message. The same one who said, “I am the door” also said, “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the way that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Mt. 7:13-14). The same one who said that said, “I am the Door” said “I am the Way No one comes to the Father but by me” (Jn. 14:6). And so Paul also writes, “Through Jesus we have access to the Father” (Eph. 2:18). Peter proclaimed the same. Before the religious authorities in Jerusalem, Peter said, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

That message would ultimately cost Peter his life, even as it contributed also to the crucifixion of Jesus. Yet Peter knew the most uncaring thing he could say, the most unloving thing he could proclaim is that everyone can relax

because all roads lead to heaven, all of them equally viable, and all the doors are wide open.

A part of us wants to say that too, right, to fit in, to not sound exclusive or judgmental. And the world dearly wants us to say it. But Scripture just doesn't give us that latitude, that freedom, that authority. Jesus doesn't give us license to ignore or contradict what he has spoken so clearly and consistently. According to Jesus, there is one Way to heaven, one Door, and therefore one mission. Verse 16: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."

You and I know some of these people Jesus is thinking about, people who don't recognize Jesus as the Way or reject him as the Door. You and I love some of these who are not listening to his voice, but to other voices. And the most unloving thing you and I can do is to be respectfully silent, allowing them to go merrily on that broad, easy path. There is a time to be silent and to listen respectfully. But there's also a time to speak (respectfully) and to nudge (gently), and to lead (faithfully) and to witness (winsomely).

"I am the door of the sheep" Jesus said. "If anyone enters by me, he will be saved." Many of the doors we know are meant to be barriers. I visit jails with sliding steel doors, solid but for one little window. When they are closed, there's no prying them open. One reason the front door to your home is heavier and sturdier than, say, the door to your pantry, is to prevent, or at least slow down, those who would break in. Across the street, the door to the bank's vault is thick and nearly impenetrable. When these doors are closed and locked, they all send the same message: "Stop. Keep Out! We're closed. You're not welcome here."

As the Door, that's not the message Jesus is sending . . . not at all. "Come to me" he invites. "This is for you." "Bring your family and friends. This entrance is for them too." It's the only way in, but it's open for all.

Jesus wants to be the Door everyone uses. In the parable of the Wedding Banquet, the King pleads with the

people: “I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered. Everything is ready! Come to the wedding banquet!” (Mt. 22:4). Jesus is not interested in being a barrier, but rather an entrance.

This door is for everyone, regardless of where they’re from, what language they speak, what color their skin, or even what they’ve done. Remember, in that same parable, when hardly anyone was choosing to come to the wedding banquet, the king tells his servants, “Go out to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find . . . both bad and good” (v. 9ff). In Greek, word order makes a difference. Putting the word bad first adds emphasis. Yes, even the wicked, the scoundrels and the rascallions are invited.

And remember, it’s free. A king’s banquet (!), and it doesn’t even cost them a penny!

Have you ever thought how much it costs to use doors? It costs a lot of money for the right to use the door into your home, (rent or mortgage and property taxes). We are charged to use the door that leads into the movie theater, to get into the concert hall, or into Miller Park. When you go through the door of a shop downtown it’s expected that you’re there to buy something, and not just use the restroom or to hang out for the afternoon. Even going through the door into a friend’s house for dinner usually implies reciprocity because it’s not much of a friendship if one party is doing all the giving and the other party is doing all the receiving. And you can’t just walk into a country club and start acting like you own the place. It costs money to use doors.

Not so for the door who is Jesus. Can you believe it? Using this Door is absolutely free, and on the other side there is eternal life, a king’s banquet where there’s singing and dancing and feasting and laughter and exploring.

Jesus is the Door to heaven, the only one. But he’s not there to keep people out. He’s there to make sure people have a way to get in. Yes, he’s saying there is no other door, no other way. But instead of squirming with discomfort

because he's transgressed our sensitivities, maybe we should say, "Thank you!" For without him, there would be no door, no way, no access to the Father, no forgiveness, no salvation. Don't let this text make you squirm. Rather, let it incite you to praise and thanksgiving. After all, it cost you nothing, but it cost him everything. The shepherd has laid down his life for the sheep. It's over his dead body that we get in.

No one can, by their own reason or strength or wealth, climb over the walls into the kingdom of God. Those who try will be forcibly expelled. They are thieves and robbers. They don't belong there. But those who use the Door will be most welcome. And I can't stress it enough: passage through the Door who is Jesus is free. Isaiah 55: "Come, you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost . . . Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare" (Is. 55:1-2). No tickets. No cover charge. No cashiers. No hidden costs and fees. No contracts. No exchanging of money or favors or promises or reciprocity. Just use the Door, and invite others to do the same.

"I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved." Thanks be to God! Amen.

