

May 11, 2014

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.....Amen

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Holy God, touch us with the power and assurance of the early disciples, as they shared and lived the Good News. Empower us to be your hands and feet in this world.

Remind us that so many in the world are persecuted, so many are hungry, so many are homeless, and oh..so many are lonely, without friend or fellowship.

Remind us of the millions in need and show us ways by which we may offer them life and hope and love.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Today's Gospel is often known as "The Good Shepherd Sunday".....but that is not the essence of the story we just heard.. Our Lord himself describes that he is not just the shepherd, rather he is the **gate**.

. "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate."

These are very clear words even for our traditional translations. In "The Message", a recent translation in every day English

Jesus said, "I'll be explicit..... I am the Gate for the sheep. All those others are up to no good—sheep stealers, every one of them. But the sheep didn't listen to them. I am the Gate."

I believe these words open new facets of Jesus' being to us that enable us to grow in our relationship with him, deepen our faith, and experience more of the life he has provided for us.

First of all what kind of gate is Jesus Christ? What kind of gate does he have in mind when he is talking to the disciples?

In our lives, we are surrounded by gates. We arrive at and depart from airports through gates. In order to get to those gates we pass through a security gate. Many of us have gates that provide an entrance into a courtyard, or security gates that keep people out. For those of us who are science fiction fans, there are even star gates that provide access to distant galaxies.

Thus, preparing the sermon I began thinking about gates and what kind of gate our Lord would be, but then very quickly I realized...it doesn't matter what the gate is like. What matters is that our Lord Jesus himself is the gate and to reach life everlasting we must pass through him.

Every day all of us are required to make decisions. From dawn till dusk our lives are full of decisions....many are routine and we don't even need to think about them. Others are less frequent but nonetheless they offer us no controversy and there is only one logical conclusion.

But then there are the other decisions when we need to have our antennas raised and be alert to the outcomes of our decisions.

In ancient Israel sheep folds were not like the corrals that ranchers build in the United States. They were crude affairs, often built of bushes or branches, or at best a low row of stones. Still, they were enough to contain the sheep and keep them from wandering into danger.

Several flocks were often penned together. This was done to provide them

with more safety. The flocks would mingle, until the sheep were separated by the calls of the shepherd.

The shepherds would become the gate to the sheep fold. They would lie in front of the opening to the fold so that nothing could enter without them knowing. Thus human gate provided entrance to the fold for sheep recognized as part of the flock.... and also served as protection from outside threats.

In the same way as the sheep who answered the shepherd's call were allowed to enter through the gate, the decisions we make in our everyday lives decide whether we are eligible to pass by Jesus lying at the entrance to the fold of eternal life.

Let us for the heck of it:.....review a number of such decisions we all face.

You or I walk into a 7/11 store. The assistant is busy and gives us change from a purchase for a twenty dollar bill, rather than the ten dollar bill we have actually passed across the counter. What do we do....do we just accept the mistake or point out the error?

We pass by a homeless person begging on the street, what do we do. I can hear the conversation in our minds. "He or she really needs the money...give the money....don't hesitate..just dig deep and give". The other voice says."they will only use the money you give them to buy more booze or more drugs.... what are you thinking about?".

A loved one says something to me that is blatantly untrue or unfair. It is also conveyed in a scathing, highly judgmental manner.

How should I react...one voice says to me..."this needs to be dealt with immediately....load both barrels and give it to her/him". Then the other voice says.. "you don't know what pressures he/she are under today....you love this person so wait for the right moment to put the relationship back on track."

Our society has changed so much over the years; when I was a kid, going to church was just about all there was to do on a Sunday morning, other than lie comfortably in bed.

So it was easier, perhaps, in those days, to participate in Trinity Church activities, whether it be at our Lord's table on a Sunday morning or at other times . These days as we know on a Sunday morning there is every competing event that the mind can conceive.....so it leads to serious choices.

No easy answer to any of these questions, but I would suggest there is one answer in each situation that will improve our odds, as one of the flock, of us being allowed to pass by our Lord Jesus lying at the gate.

We read that "the flock" has always been understood as a symbol of the Church and the family of God.

Jesus provides the entrance into the family of God.

Because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we are able to enter into a relationship with God, and with our brothers and sisters in faith.

The family of God is comprised of sheep of all sizes, shapes and breeds. We are indeed a most unlikely flock....I believe there is even one with us here that has a welsh sheep's accent.

We are united by our common faith, our baptism and mission. These are stronger than our differences. Certainly this can be seen in the family of God called Trinity Church in Aurora. We are very different from each other but. at the same time, we must stand united.

There is a warning in John's Gospel that some people attempt to get into the family through means other than through Jesus Christ. People who have made the wrong decisions when they arrive at the gate.

These people have their own agenda—not God's. Their goals are selfish and on occasion they seek to hurt and harm.

The emphasis of this Gospel, however, is not a warning about thieves, but a celebration of entrance into the family of God through the person of Jesus Christ. He is the gate.

Jesus tells his listeners that those who enter through the gate will be able to go in and out and find pasture. Pastures are places of nourishment that also provide protection.

As the family of God, we are led to pasture and we are able to grow in our Christian lives.

It is tempting for us to equate abundant life with the cheap imitations of the world. The abundant life that is ours through Christ does not necessarily involve comfort, wealth, or an abundance of worldly things. When Jesus talks about abundance, he is referring to the things of God—relationship, presence, power, steadfast love, and abundant forgiveness.

Jesus Christ is the gate of invitation to enter and experience a full and loving relationship with God. We are invited to live our lives in a way that will allow us to pass through the gate and to help others follow a similar path to life everlasting.

Amen