

I Am Not the Only Sheep  
Psalm 23; John 10: 1-11  
April 30, 2023  
Rev. Paulette Mixon-Weller

Gates: Israel- “You are studying to be a pastor, a female pastor.” in a heavy Israeli accent at the border crossing between Egypt and Israel. I was nervous for a minute, but answered “Yes, I am.” I waited, knowing that my ability to enter the country seemed to be in the hands of this young female soldier who questioned me while holding my passport. Some people were not allowed to enter. I waited nervously. Then she said, “That’s awesome! A female pastor!” I breathed a sigh of relief and laughed. I was allowed to enter the gate.

Gates seem to stand as a door to keep those “in” safe and those “outside” outside whatever happens to them. It can be easy to only think about our own safety and well-being in moments like that.

“The Lord is MY Shepherd. I shall not want.” The Lord is my ruler and my way of crossing between inside and out.

But what about the other sheep? If I am in, somehow I think I have a right to decide who else gets to join me in my status. We are tempted to judge the station of others. Almost like we are de facto gatekeepers ourselves.

“Jesus said, ‘I am the gate.’ Not, ‘I am the wall, the barrier, the enclosure, the dividing line.’ Not, ‘I am that which separates, isolates, segregates and incarcerates.’ I am the gate, the door, the opening, the passageway, the place where freedom begins.”

“Jesus is the gate. We are not. Gatekeeping is not our job.”

I recently read about a church on the border between the US and Mexico.

For many years there was a church that met on the border of Mexico and the US just below San Diego. A Mexican pastor and an American pastor worked together to have one united church that spanned across the border. At first there was only a line, then a chain link border fence, then a steel barrier. The community found a way to connect through it all. Sometimes they would pass the peace of Christ by putting their pinky fingers through the tiny holes in the barrier. Sometimes these connections allowed a deported mother a chance to connect with her children.

(Debie Thomas on Journey with Jesus)

The church at the border united people who knew the Shepherd's voice.

Jesus is the open door to connection. When have doors opened up in your life? When have doors of connection opened between you and others?

Our job is to be sheep and to follow the voice of the Shepherd. I am a sheep. You are a sheep. Together we are sheep. Together under the guidance of our Shepherd we are gathered and led.

A shepherd has been a metaphor for a political leader since the time of Homer, Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle (circa 382-322 BC) described a king as "a benefactor of his people, inasmuch as he devotes his whole talents to their welfare, and tends them as a shepherd does his sheep." Jesus the gate, Jesus the Shepherd devotes his whole talents to our welfare- to mine and yours.

So what do we do with all this? What is our job if not gatekeepers?

If we look to our Acts passage, we get a glimpse of what the early church did.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers.” They shared everything. They ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

We would be wise to do likewise, investing in community with glad and generous hearts.

So I have made a lot of mistakes in my life, but one thing I am very proud of was that in high school, in my Senior year, my 2 best friends and I decided to welcome people who had no where else to sit at our table. We witnessed 2 freshmen boys being told that they were not welcome at another table, and we invited them to sit with us. The 5 of us had a great year together during lunch. Our table felt like a place of refuge and welcome.

So often I have not listened to the still small voice of the spirit nudging me to invite someone in or to reach out in some way. I’d like to listen more often and be the community that Christ calls us to be. We are so loved and welcomed by God in Christ that we can share that welcome with others. Amen.