

## “Opening the Gate”

- Many of you watching this know me, and know that I have two sons
  - Not only have I seen a bunch of kid movies over the past 8 years with my older son, Gaius
  - I am certain I have many more yet to go with Atticus, who is 9 months old yesterday
  - One of the better movies that we have seen many many many times is Frozen
    - Particularly the first half where all the good singable songs are!
    - If you’ve not seen it, don’t worry, basically there is one point in the movie at the very beginning that I want to discuss
    - Leading up to this, the girls’ parents had closed the palace gates to keep Elsa safe, and to also hide the fact that she had those powers
    - The gates had been shut for a long time, but now it was time for her coronation and party
    - During this party, Elsa gets upset about her sister, Anna, wanting to marry a man she just met<sup>1</sup>
    - Elsa, out of anger and possibly fear that her growing powers would hurt someone, and she was going to be exposed...
      - Said, “the party is over, shut the gates.”
    - Naturally it did not work, and the plot begins to unfold around Anna going after her sister to save her
    - To get her to open the gates to her heart again, not just the palace
    - There’s a lot in there... that’s a lot of meaning wrapped up in those gates.
    - I think this connects very nicely without our scripture readings for today
    - We, as a church, even geographically distance as we are,
    - We are being prepared for now for Pentecost. We are half way there.
    - We are being prepared for the time when the church, like the disciples, go out and share the good news
    - We are being called to open up *the* Gate
  - What is the gate?

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X\\_WalaBdGil](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_WalaBdGil)

- Funny you should ask, as in today's Gospel Jesus says more than once, "I am the gate."
- This is that amazing passage in John where Jesus comforts his listeners not only with that line
- But with the famous claim in the verse immediately following this gospel that he is the Good Shepherd
- Yes, there are multiple metaphors here, it can be a little messy if you are trying to directly map Jesus to something
- Certainly the disciples had the same confused look on their faces too, or so Scripture seems to say
- It even prompts Jesus to clarify a little
- But when reading this passage, I do not think we have to dig very deeply to understand what Jesus is saying
- The Good Shepherd is an ancient way of describing God and God's coming Messiah
- A gentle leader, one who protects and provides for the sheep and people
- The one the people love in return, recognize his voice, follow and love.
- It harkens all the way back to Psalm 23 where King David sings those Psalms about God as being our shepherd
- Through life, through death, and always looking out for us
- And Jesus says he is the gate
- The access point, the place where the shepherd would go and get the sheep
- Jesus says that those leaders who come not through him are like the thieves and bandits who slip over the walls at night and steal sheep
- I think Jesus is taking a little dig here at the Pharisees<sup>2</sup>, especially since not too long ago in John Jesus healed the blind man on the Sabbath
- And the religious leaders have been angry about it ever since- angry that he broke the rule about "working" on the Lord's Day
- Jesus was pointing out that the religious leaders of his day, rather than opening up a way to God, were actually walling people off
- Keeping people out
- They are the ones coming in over the walls to the trapped sheep and hurting and stealing from them
- So what I want to highlight here is the amazing message that Jesus is sending about what his role is

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<sup>2</sup> PulpitFiction, Year A Easter 4, <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/easter4a>

- That he is opening up a way for the sheep to access God, and God's abundance and plentifulness
- I mean, What is the purpose of a gate if not to provide a way of access.<sup>3</sup>
- It is the very opposite of what Rome and what the religious leaders were doing as they were closing people off
- Capturing and exploiting and oppressing
- It is worth remembering that during this time, 70-80% of the population were food insecure.<sup>4</sup>
- I bet it was much higher among those listening to Jesus that day
- Jesus feeds the 5000, heals the sick and the blind when no one else would help them that day
- And he is saying, I am making a gate, I am giving everyone access to the Father
- To come in and go out, and pasture... that spiritual and physical abundance.
- I think Jesus wants us to be the same, an access point through our lives and through our faith, to God.
- To be open gates.
- In Acts, we see a fantastic, idealized example of the early church doing this just- opening up the gates
  - They were sharing everything common, all needs were met, everyone was happy and getting along... well, probably not really
  - This is almost certainly a fond remembrance or ideal, much less an historical account
  - You'll remember that the early church was anything but perfect, Peter and Paul were arguing about the Gentiles
  - Ananias and Sapphira lied to the apostles about their giving
  - And soon there would be arguments over doctrine and dogma
  - But what a vision, a dream, to have for the Christian community
  - It's also worth noting what this group was experiencing as this book was being written.
  - We suspect Acts was written over 100 years after Jesus
  - And during the last third of that hundred years, things had gotten bad for Christians

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<sup>3</sup> <https://episcopalchurch.org/library/sermon/gate-easter-4-may-3-2020>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=4450](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4450)

- Nero blamed them for burning Rome and began hunting them down<sup>5</sup>
- And later, we suspect that Domitian persecuted them in an effort to restore the great pantheon of Rome- a return to our faith kind of effort
- Things had been hard- I imagine them thinking fondly about the good old days when everything was easy and there was plenty to go around
- But even during the persecution, even when things were not plenty, when people were dying and afraid of getting caught
- These faithful Christians kept worshipping and praying.
- They knew how much they needed God. And each other.
- They never closed those gates.
- Perhaps I am just really starting to miss it, but these readings are here I think to form us, shape us, and get us ready to be community
  - Ready to be the church after Pentecost- whether in person or separated by distance
  - It makes me wonder what creates a community that lives into being an open gate to God and to abundance
  - I mean both spiritual abundance, and abundance in meeting the physical needs of others
  - And I think in order to be a community that works like an open gate, we have to start looking inside our own hearts
  - Starts with the fences we put up inside, I think
  - Because Jesus is the gate in those fences too- Jesus is the way for us to escape our own fear, shame,
    - and all those things that would cause us to shut off from ourselves and others
  - I want to invite you during our stay-at-home time to spend some energy in prayer, or journaling, or with a spiritual director over zoom
  - Maybe this time can be preparing ourselves to be open gates
  - Start with the people you are with- how are your relationships?
  - Are you giving grace and understanding during these stressful times
  - Do you need to ask for grace, or for forgiveness, to reconnect to those you love and live with
  - Maybe you find yourself thinking about past events and relationships, about forgiveness that needs to be shared
  - Just a few months ago it was on my heart that there was a person from years ago with whom the relationship did not end well
  - It was complex, it was never intentional, but both sides participated in something that caused a lot of pain to each of us

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<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution\\_of\\_Christians\\_in\\_the\\_Roman\\_Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire)

- I wrote that person a letter and simply asked for forgiveness for all of the unintentional ways that I had hurt them
- Or maybe this time can be used to mend that connection to the one who created us, loves us, and sustains us
- How's your walk with God? When did you pray last- not just the words by rote, but had a good talk with the Lord?
- I am convinced that the best way to become a church that is an open gate to God, is to start that hard work on our own hearts
- Jesus says he is the Good Shepherd who loves the sheep
- And he is the Gate out of the locked rooms we often confine ourselves too.
- Open up the Gates!

Amen.