

# The Good Shepherd and the Gate

John 10:1-10

May 3, 2020

Intro

Let me begin with a poem, titled “Flower” by a Korean poet, Kim Chun-Soo, translated by Alex Rose.

*“Before speaking her name, she had been nothing but a gesture.*

*When I spoke her name, she came to me and became a flower.*

*Now who will speak my name, one fitting this colour and fragrance of mine, as I had spoken hers.*

*So that I may go to her and become her flower.*

*We all yearn to become something. I yearn to become an unforgettable meaning to you*

*And you to me.”*

This is one of the most popular poems in South Korea. My favorite line is “When I spoke her name, she came to me and became a flower.”

Zoom mtgs has been norm these days. Every Tuesday at noon I have been having a meeting with 9 United Methodist clergy colleagues in the great Bridgeport area. We meet via zoom to encourage one another and pray together. Two weeks ago we had a pleasant surprise visit by Bishop Bickerton. He surprised me and my colleagues more by calling each by name as he entered the zoom mtg. “Hi Kun Sam, you look sitting like a company president ready to interview a candidate for a job opening.”

I was glad and happy to hear my bishop calling me by name.

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We are pleased if someone remembers our names. Aren't we?

Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd and I know my sheep by name, and they know me." What a claim he makes.

In ancient Palestine, there was the communal sheepfold in the village that was owned by all the shepherds. They would bring their sheep in after a day of grazing in the field, and all the shepherds would bring their sheep in that communal sheepfold. And in the morning time, the shepherds would come back to bring their sheep out to the field.

Well how in the world do you get your own sheep in the midst of all the sheep that are there? I mean they all look alike, don't they? This is how. The shepherd named his sheep one by one. And the sheep knew the voice of the shepherd, so he simply had to call them by name and his own sheep would follow him out to find pasture. So when Jesus talked about knowing his sheep by name, people must have understood it without much difficulty.

Christ is the good shepherd. And as the good shepherd, Christ knows me. Say it to yourself. "Christ the good shepherd knows me. He knows my name." Wow. Wow. His knowing my name is far more intimate and deeper than the Bishop's knowing my name. His knowing you by name means he know everything about me. My strength, my weakness, my brokenness, my pain, my problems, my worries, my interest, my wish, my dream, everything about me.

Christ who knows not only my name but also my everything welcomes me and loves me. This is something radical. This radical truth would radically transform our life in this world.

Insecurity destroys our living. We constantly ask, "Am I okay? Am I good enough? Am I acceptable? Am I not a failure? Look, I don't have accomplished anything worthwhile, do I? I am always behind the race." Don't we?

We hunger for acceptance and recognition and don't get them enough. Consequently, our self-esteem hit the bottom and we fall into a deep valley of self-abuse and even self-despair.

I'm convinced that continuing insecurity in our lives is resulting from a lack of assurance that we are loved by God. That's really the root of it. Once we know and believe that God loves us and we are loved by God, a new life is born in us.

What is faith? Paul Tillich, theologian answers, "Faith is accepting that you are accepted by God." Yes, this faith enables us to live a new life in this world. Hear these words of God for the people of God and know you are God's precious masterpiece God loves.

"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine." Isaiah 43:1

"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" (Isaiah 49:15)

"You will be my treasured possession. I will spare you, just as a father has compassion and spares his son." (Malachi 3:17)

"See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." (Isaiah 49:16)

And listen to Jesus Christ, our Lord. Hear him, believe him and accept what he offers, "I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep by name."

Paraphrasing the first part of the poem, "Flower", Jesus might say, "Before speaking your name, you had been nothing but a gesture. When I spoke your name, you came to me and became a flower." Hallelujah!

So, let's go back to the gospel. We hear another claim Jesus made. That is, Jesus says, "I am the gate."

Stop and think for a moment. What is the purpose of the gate? It is precisely to create an opening in the fence. Through this opening, both coming in and going out can happen naturally.

We have been locked down almost two months at home. Many suffer from cabin fever. Surely we all want to be out of the house. There must be in and out to live a healthy and normal life.

When Jesus says, "I am the gate," it is his way of inviting us both in and out. He is telling us that he is our way to safety, to entering a restful place where we know we are loved and protected. But he is also telling us that we will need to go back out through that gate into the world. It is his invitation to leave safety and security and go back out into a world of challenges and opportunities.

Imagine that you do have a place surrounded by tall and thick walls without a door or a gate? Imagine you are stuck inside there. You probably don't want to stay there too long, do you?

But unfortunately, we live in that place, being stuck consciously and unconsciously. It is a place you don't leave, because leaving that place means to face an unknown territory full of uncertainty, because you are afraid of tomorrow. It is a place you stay put, because you do not want to bother others nor to be bothered by others, because you are disinterested in relationship.

It is a place you remain, because there you are right all the time and you don't want to be and don't need to be changed, because you are self-content and self-centered. It is a place you remain stuck, because of betrayal by your close friend and family members, because you are bitter and angry. It is a place you have constructed for yourself. It is a place surrounded by your self-isolating walls.

To you and me, Jesus says, "I am the gate. Come, my friend and come. I am the gate in all your self-isolating walls. I am the gate to liberate you

from all your burdens and fears. Let me lead you to green pasture and fresh water.”

*One man walked across a moor with a friend who had four dogs. As they walked, three of the dogs would run out across the moor, leaping over creeks and chasing rabbits and joyfully exploring their environment.*

*But one of the dogs would only run in a small circle right in front of his owner. No matter how many miles they walked or how far afield the other dogs went, this dog would only run in a tight circle very close to them.*

*He asked his friend why, and he replied, “This dog was kept for his entire life prior to coming to me in a very small cage. His body has left the cage, but his mind still carries it with him. For him, the world outside the cage does not exist, and so no matter how big and beautiful the moor, he will never run out across it. I bring him here so he can breathe the fresh air, but he’s still running circles in his cage.” – “Into the Silent Land” by Martin Laird*

Are we not the dog who carries the cage with him out onto the moor?  
Are we not refusing to see the open gate in our hearts? Are we not  
refusing to see Jesus, the open gate?

Hear the invitation by Jesus, the gate, while listening a song, “You are Mine” by David Haas.

*I will come to you in the silence. I will lift you from all your fear. You will hear My voice. I claim you as My choice. Be still, and know I am near*

*I am hope for all who are hopeless. I am eyes for all who long to see In the shadows of the night, I will be your light. Come and rest in Me*

*I am strength for all the despairing. Healing for the ones who dwell in shame. All the blind will see, the lame will all run free. And all will know My name*

*I am the Word that leads all to freedom. I am the peace the world cannot give. I will call your name, embracing all your pain. Stand up, now, walk, and live.*

*Do not be afraid, I am with you I have called you each by name Come and follow Me I will bring you home I love you and you are mine*

Amen. Amen.