

## **Bible Study Guide: Week of 4-27-2020**

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Dear Good Shepherd members and friends,

Appropriately enough, here we are at the Fourth Sunday in Easter—Good Shepherd Sunday! This is not how I pictured celebrating this day with you all, by any means, but we trust in the guidance, protection, and peace of Jesus, our Good Shepherd.

God bless you this week!  
Pastor Andrew

## **John 10:1-10**

[Jesus said to the crowds] ‘Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. <sup>2</sup>The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.’ <sup>6</sup>Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

<sup>7</sup> So again Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

**[Jesus said to the crowds] ‘Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit.**

Jesus’ figure of speech here seems to equate “entering the sheepfold” with salvation; that is, entering into the life that God intends for people to have. That is the life Jesus has come to show and share with all people, yet he does not find a welcome with many. The word “bandit” here is the same word that John uses to describe Barabbas, the man whom the crowds demand to be released by Pilate during Jesus’ trial. The crowds—perhaps the same crowds to whom Jesus is speaking here—will demand that the bandit be released and the true shepherd be crucified.

**<sup>2</sup>The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.**

Jesus begins to mix his metaphors here. Though we often think of this passage as being about “The Good Shepherd,” it is important to note that language about the good shepherd doesn’t start in earnest until after this passage in v. 11. Jesus claimst to be both the gate and the one who enters by the gate (the shepherd of the sheep). It is possible to read the reference to “gatekeeper” in v. 3 as a reference to the Father, but we need not read this allegorically. Clearly at play in this passage, however, is the notion of authority and power. Jesus says he has the authority or power to lay down his life and take it up again (v. 15). Here, he apparently has the approval and help of “the gatekeeper.” It would be appropriate to understand this as a reference to the Father.

**<sup>4</sup>When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.**

On one level, Jesus is merely describing the behavior of sheep and shepherds. But his own work was described in John 1 as coming “to his own.” Jesus has come to bring his own out of the world. His going ahead of them may well be a reference to the cross.

**<sup>5</sup>They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.’ <sup>6</sup>Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.**

Once again, Jesus is plainly describing the behavior of sheep—sheep indeed run from the voice of a stranger and come when called by their shepherd. As we have seen above, however, this is a confusing and multi-faceted metaphor Jesus is crafting and it is no wonder that the people don’t understand what he is saying.

**<sup>7</sup> So again Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.**

Jesus becomes more direct here, plainly insisting that he is the gate for the sheep. His words about the sheep listening to him and hearing his voice calls to mind Jesus’ appearance to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection. It is when he calls her by name and she hears his voice that she recognizes him as the Lord.

So which is it—gate or shepherd? Some commentators point out that a sheepfold in ancient times was often constructed as a low stone or wooden enclosure with a gap left open in one side—a shepherd-sized gap. The shepherd would lay him or herself across that gap to keep the sheep in and keep danger out. This may be what Jesus has in mind as being both gate and shepherd, as well as “laying down his life” for the sheep.

“Those who came before” Jesus could be a reference to many different things. Given Jesus’ respect for the prophets of the Old Testament, it is unlikely he would refer to them as “thieves and bandits,” although they are

in one sense “those who came before” Jesus. It may be that Jesus is merely saying that all others who come pretending to offer life and salvation are untrustworthy. This could also be a political reference. We all know that Caesar liked to style himself as one who offered life and peace to his subjects. Perhaps Jesus is drawing a distinction between earthly kingdoms and his own reign of peace.

**<sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.**

This is one of the most plain statements of purpose Jesus gives for his coming into the world—that all “may have life, and have it abundantly.” The thief, therefore, is a contrast between Jesus and anyone or anything that seems to promise us life and peace and joy, but really offers deception and disappointment.

**Reflection Questions:**

1. How do you decide whom you should listen to and follow?
2. Have you ever heard or experienced God calling you by name? Reflect on this experience (Hint—remember your baptism!)
3. How do you recognize the work of thieves and bandits in your life and in the world?