

Message for Sunday, April 26, 2026

Scripture: John 10: 1-10

Title: Confusion

Welcome

Announcements:

Giving Options... box, offering, QR, online. Special offering for April is UMCOR, but starting for May is Verde Valley Sanctuary; United Methodist Scholarship Applications are in the back on the table. Applications due June 1. Today we will welcome new members. Verde Valley Voices concert-see Juliet for tickets.

Song

Call To Worship

L: The Lord is our shepherd.

P: We are Christ's sheep.

L: The shepherd shelters us in green pastures.

P: In Christ, we dwell secure.

L: The shepherd nourishes us and restores our souls.

Christ is our shepherd and gate to the Most High.

Unison Prayer

Loving Shepherd, you call us your own. When danger is close at hand, you gather us to yourself, that we might dwell secure.

When evil surrounds us, you give us a home and safe place to rest.

When foes threaten our fellowship, you rescue us from peril. Restore our souls, Gentle Savior,

and lead us in the paths of righteousness, that we may walk in the ways of goodness and mercy, all the days of our lives. Amen.

L: As we come to this time of offering, lest us remember that giving is an opportunity to respond to God's generosity with our own.

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Scripture: John 10:1-10 NRSV

“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. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.

⁸All who came before me^[a] are thieves and bandits, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

L: The word of God for the people of God.

P: Thanks be to God.

Message: Confusion

Some of you may not have heard of the process called “deconstruction.” This is a process that many people go through as they grow up where they deconstruct the beliefs that they grew up with and, at least in theory, reconstruct their beliefs as they mature. You may have engaged in this process when you thought of something that you believed in in your childhood, but you decided that you didn’t necessarily believe that particular way or thing anymore. Now don’t feel bad if you’ve never intentionally engaged in this process. I think many of us do it a little bit, but it is rarely done intentionally.

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Today's scripture may not be one that you automatically think of when you think of deconstructing your beliefs but I want to walk you through this passage a bit to help you understand it, to help you see how you may have heard it interpreted, and then to point you back to seeing that there are other ways to view it. This scripture provides us with a unique opportunity to do this today; not all passages lend themselves as easily to this process. I also think that doing this today is great because it shows that passages you may take for granted can be translated and understood in another way.

Our passage is a rather famous one and I want to read it again here before we keep going.

“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. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.”⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

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The first thing I want us to look at is what is going on with this passage. Who is the audience Jesus is addressing himself to? This context is that Jesus is addressing the pharisees. Those who are supposed to be guiding the people and helping them in their relationships with God. In the prior verses Jesus is speaking about spiritual blindness and the inability for those who are

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spiritually blind to understand what he is about. So, this passage is Jesus's attempt to explain this to the pharisees-who don't understand it.

I say this is Jesus' attempt to explain this because he seems to get his metaphors all twisted around. I don't want us to get bogged down on this part, but I do want you to notice it and realize that there is some confusion in these verses. In this passage Jesus identifies himself as the gate to the sheep fold, but he also identifies himself as a shepherd. So, which is it? Now before you're quick to run and say, "well both," be mindful of the fact these images aren't critical to understanding the ultimate point of the verse. They are, however, critical to how these passages have been understood.

When we break down this passage, verse 1 implies that Jesus is the gate. At verse 2 the metaphor changes and Jesus becomes the shepherd. It then proceeds to describe the relationship that sheep have with their shepherd. They know his voice, they trust and follow him, they won't follow a stranger because they don't recognize his voice. Ultimately though Jesus comes back to his point in verse 10. He came to give life and give it more abundantly.

Let's get into some of the interpretational issues today. If you're like me you grew up hearing this mixture of metaphor meaning that Jesus is the one you must profess your faith in, in order to experience salvation. Where that is pulled from seems quite obvious to most of us, right? Jesus is the gate, what do you do with a gate? You go through it. See! You can't be saved unless you accept Christ as your Lord and savior. I want to push back on this though. This makes a number of theological jumps that the text doesn't necessarily support. The first is that this passage is more focused on addressing those that are leading the sheep. Verses 7-9 show us that the sheep don't follow the shepherd who is a thief and a bandit. In fact, if you are Christ's sheep you will listen to that which brings you life.

In order to interpret this verse as being about salvation being a confession of faith, or a testament that Jesus is the barrier that we need to

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agree with/overcome in order to be saved you have to make assumptions about the passage that are not there. You have to assume that there are qualifications for the sheep. You have to assume that the safety and security of the sheep depends on their relationship with the gate and finally you need to assume that the sheep's safety depends on their relationship with the shepherd. You also have to bring interpretation from other texts in order to justify what you are talking about. Jesus says, "no one gets through to the father except through me." Yeah I love that verse too, but I have to wonder if you haven't paid attention to what this text has to say, have you really paid attention to what that verse is saying?

Let's go back to the text. Let's re-read it again.

"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. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

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Is there any statement here that says that only the good sheep will recognize the shepherd's voice? Is there any statement about the sheep will only have safety or security if they are acknowledged as part of the flock? Does the passage say that the sheep have a personal relationship with the shepherd?

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The answer to all of these questions is no.

None of these things are prerequisite to what Jesus does.

Why is this important? Remember how I talked about deconstruction. You see many of us get hung up with how does Jesus save? We get fixated on Jesus saving so much that we forget what he saved all of us. It is at the end “that they may have life and have it abundantly.” We tend to put that behind barriers and hurdles that people have to assent to, but those barriers are not in the text. You see the shepherd is the shepherd of all of them. The shepherd has brought abundant life to all of the sheep.

I think too often we are fixated on trying to be good instead of living into the abundant life that our resurrected savior has given us. This is not to say that life is sunshine and roses or that everything will be good for you. It's to say that abundant life is the point of a relationship with the shepherd, why do you want to stand in the way of it? Personally, I think if God did everything God did to remove barriers between Godself and us, why should we put barriers back?

Live this week into that abundance and be comforted that whether you are a good sheep or a bad sheep, Christ has given you life and abundance anyway. Amen.

New Member Joining

Pastoral Prayer/The Lord's Prayer

Song

Benediction

Song

Goodbye