

## John 10:1-10<sup>vi</sup>

Jesus said: "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. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. *So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to him. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*

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### <sup>v</sup> About the Gospel: John 10:1-10

John 10:1-21 serves as a transition from the Feast of Tabernacles and its theme of light (chaps. 7-9) to the Feast of the Dedication of the Temple, Hanukkah, which closes the series of feasts used as the context for Jesus' teaching. This passage, based on Ezekiel 34, is a figurative attack on the leaders of Israel.

John's identification of Jesus as shepherd and gate is similar to the synoptic gospels' portrayal of Jesus' ministry in terms of shepherding. In Luke 15:3-7, the parable of the lost sheep is told in response to the Pharisees' lack of care for the outcast. The Pharisees' inability to accept Jesus' challenge provokes further teaching. Jesus is "the gate" (v. 7), the way the true shepherd approaches the sheep and the way the sheep go in and out. Jesus provides freedom, refuge from sin, true sustenance and life itself.

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## vi Reflection and Response

If we reflect on the image of gates, we may remember those that clank shut with finality. The ornate wrought iron of the country club? Clunk. The utilitarian wire of the border zone? Slam. Too often the message of the gate is “Keep Out.”

Instead imagine the weathered wooden gate opening easily to the broad meadow. It sways gracefully in the breeze, inviting entrance to a land of tall grasses and fragrant clover. The good news of today’s gospel is that Jesus is like this gate.

Jesus is also like the shepherd. Do we really believe that Jesus calls us by name, offers green pasture for our deepest needs and personally guarantees us safe passage? If we hesitate, perhaps we should look at models who take him at his word.

Sofia Cavalletti, author of *The Religious Potential of the Child*, believed in giving the youngest children the greatest realities. Making this text the centerpiece of her catechesis, she found that children derived a serene peace from its imagery. A 7-year-old said, “Not even my brother knows everything about me, but the Good Shepherd knows me by name.” One child drew a sheep with flowers in his mouth because “Jesus takes him to beautiful places.” Children seem to sink naturally into the parable, finding in it the gratification of their desires to be loved and love in return.

In *Parables*, Megan McKenna summarizes the implications of the open-gate, welcoming-shepherd imagery, touching the lives of the children and us:

Jesus, the parable of God, reminds us that no matter what we think God is, no matter how sure we are of God, be careful. Maybe we don’t know God at all. Maybe there is much more, but we can only learn it by staking our life on this story and throwing in our lot with those who become the story and enchant all the others with its power and grace. Jesus tells us that this story, the story of God, comes true when we do too.