

Who is Jesus? Series

**"I am the Gate"***(Biblical Text: John 10:1-10)**Dr. Michael F. Gardner, Senior Pastor - Old Mission Church, Fairway, Kansas*

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Today is Mother's Day - no surprise there for most of us. Except, according to most surveys, about 30 percent of the male population. If you are one of those forgetful souls this morning, I just have this to say - *Call your mom!*

Today I am grateful for my mother. She gave me life, and had me baptized! As I said in the newsletter, I have lived long enough to have some regrets as a son. The year I took a Sunday off from my own Church so I could take my mom to her Church on Mother's Day is not one of them. It was her last.

I'm also grateful for my *"dad job"* on Mother's Day. For more than thirty years I have made sure our kids remember Mother's Day. They are grown and gone, with their own families. I still remind them they have a mother!

On Mother's Day, about twenty years ago, I made sure our youngest, John, gave Ann the nice card with little coupons that he made in Sunday School. The coupons said, *"I will do the dishes."* *"I will clean my room."* *"I will mow the lawn."* *"I will take out the trash."* She loved it, and still has it.

Imagine my delight in getting a similar card a few years later! The cover said: *"Happy Father's Day! I mowed the lawn, cleaned the garage, and repaid the \$50 bucks I owe you!"* Inside it read, *"Wake up, Dad! You were just dreaming!"* Yeah!

Mother's Day is both wonderful and difficult. *Wonderful* - because today we honor mothers, who mean so much to us. *Difficult* - because I am not the only one missing my mother today, even years after her passing. Mother's day is sometimes a bittersweet day. Some would give anything if that grandchild or child or husband for whom they have been praying could be here today. And some will wait all day for a call or a card that will not come.

We bring our frail human natures with us to Church even on holidays like this one. That is the way it is in real families, including the family of God.

But we are not alone! That's the good news today! In joy, but also in pain, Jesus gives us life! In one of my favorite verses of all the Bible, John 10:10, Jesus says, *"I have come that you may have life and live it abundantly."*<sup>1</sup> It's in our Bible text for worship this morning.

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<sup>1</sup> John 10:10, paraphrased by the author.

<sup>2</sup> John 10:7 and John 10:11. *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, Copyright © 1989. Used by permission.

In this series we're looking at Jesus' "I am" sayings from John's Gospel. On Easter we looked at "*I am the Resurrection and the Life.*" Then we looked at "*I am the Light of the World.*" Last week on communion Sunday we looked at "*I am the Bread of Life.*" Today, and next Sunday, we'll look at two verses from John 10:

**John 10:7** where Jesus says, "*I am the gate for the sheep.*" **John 10:11**, where Jesus says, "*I am the good shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep.*"<sup>2</sup>

**As it turns out - they mean the same thing. Let me explain.**

You don't really get that unless you know a little about shepherding and sheep, which Jesus' hearers would have known well. It is a subject about which most of us, especially me, know nothing at all. *I'm a city boy.*

My wife, Ann, like Dave Lowe and many others, grew up on a farm. But her folks raised dryland wheat, hay, and cattle. Not sheep. And historically, cattlemen have, well, an "*attitude*" about sheep. Not a good one!

But I have read a lot about Biblical archaeology. Sheep were important then, as they still are today. You can still see nomadic shepherds in the Holy Land. And then as now, sheep require care. Untended they will overgraze a field or wander aimlessly. They are followers by nature. If one sheep heads over a cliff or into danger, other untended sheep will just follow.

Additionally, sheep are easily susceptible to injuries and are utterly helpless against predators. If a wolf enters the pen, they won't defend themselves. They won't try to run away; instead they huddle together and be easily slaughtered. They are dependent upon the protection of the shepherd.

Then there is the geography. In the countryside of Israel, where shepherds keep their flocks, a sheep pen is nothing more than a rough circle of rocks piled into a wall with a small open space that functions as a door. Through it the shepherds drive the sheep at nightfall. There is no gate, just an opening. A *good shepherd* would keep the sheep in and wild animals out by lying and sleeping across the opening, literally becoming the *gate* for the sheep.

That context makes the rest of John 10:1-10 clearer, doesn't it? Jesus is telling us that He is not only the *good shepherd* who will give his life for the sheep. He also is *the gate, the door*, through which we find our way to safe and abundant life. And there is more. Look at the text.

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<sup>2</sup> John 10:7 and John 10:11. *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, Copyright © 1989. Used by permission.

In verses 3 and 5, Jesus reminds his hearers that not every voice we hear can be trusted. Some are, to use the words of the text, *"thieves and robbers."*

**Not everyone has your best interests at heart.** How many of you have lived long enough to know that to be true? It even is true in the field of religion. So, what can you do? We can learn and listen to Jesus words for yourself. Why? Remember? **He came to give us life!** (John 10:10) He will not lead you astray! Follow his words, and follow him. They will lead you to life!

I also want to look today at an often-neglected verse in this text, that I really had never seen before. Look at verse nine: *"I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture."*<sup>3</sup>

We get the *"coming in"* part of this verse. It has been brought to life by an artist whose painting hangs in Sunday School hallways all over the world. It shows Jesus knocking at the door. How many of you know the one I mean?<sup>4</sup>

With it we usually quote these words from Revelation 3:20: *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."*<sup>5</sup>

But the actual painting is much more profound, as is the second half of this verse. **It shows Jesus on the outside!** Out where we live and work and often struggle. I think that it isn't *"in here"* where we often need him most!

It's *"out there!"* The painting, which is by Warner Sallman, and John 10:9 doesn't only say are we saved when we invite Jesus in. In him, we also can be assured that we will be able to *"go out"* and find him wherever we go.

*"Whoever enters by me ... will come in and go out and find pasture."*

That's been my experience. He healed my heart after divorce, and thirty-six years ago, he led me to Ann, the love of my life. He helped me cope with my father's alcoholism, and my mother's death, and to use those experiences to help others. Over the decades of ministry he has been with me not just *"in here"* where I lead worship, but *"out there,"* where I need him every day.

I don't know what needs you brought to Church today. But I know this. If you are willing to follow Jesus, he'll be with you too, wherever you may go.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. John 10:9. *New Revised Standard Version.*

<sup>4</sup> The painting is Warner Sallman's, *"Christ at Heart's Door."*

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 3:20, *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, Copyright © 1946, 1952, and 1971. Used by permission.