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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“THE GATE”
John 10:7-10

? Have you ever felt the walls closing in? Does it sometimes seem your life is shrinking, that time and pain and regret are pressing in so hard from all sides you can barely catch a breath? You need a door to open so you can step out into fresh air and wide open spaces!

? Have you ever stood out in the stormy night, looking through a picture window into a cozy room? Does it sometimes seem you are locked out in the dark where sin, death, and the Devil lurk in the shadows? You need a door to open so you can step into light and life!

Our need for a door does not always *feel* so urgent. We get acclimated and settle for just a bit of elbow room. We put on a brave face and resign ourselves to living in the dark.

But sooner or later the ordinary stresses become too heavy, or a major crisis rocks our world. Our eyes are opened and we see that we are locked in or locked out.

We all need a door or a gate. We need it to open wide so that we can enter into life in all its fullness.

▣ Please turn to John 10:7-10. Jesus declares,

“Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and

find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

“I am the θύρα [thúra], the gate.” “I am the door” (they are the same word).

- Next Sunday we will dig into verses 11-15, in which Jesus calls himself **“the good shepherd.”** He is saying the same thing here, only with a tighter focus.

- ▣ First century Jewish shepherds served as living gates. Their rustic sheepfolds consisted of stone walls and an open doorway. Many (possibly most) did not have a wooden gate – just a space through which to pass. After dark, while the flock was bedded down, the shepherd slept in the opening. His body was, in effect, **“the θύρα.”**

- ▣ {A. Dieleman} This practice continued into the modern era. In the early 1900s a Scotsman named George Adam Smith toured Palestine. When he asked a shepherd why the fold had no gate the man explained, **“I am the door. When the light has gone, and all the sheep are inside, I lie in the open place, and no sheep ever goes out but across my body, and no wolf comes in unless he crosses my body. I am the door.”**

{Ps 23:2} At dawn the shepherd was the θύρα through whom the animals passed into the out-of-doors where there were **“green pastures”** for grazing and **“still waters”** for drinking. The shepherd gave access to the good gifts that are essential to life.

{Ps 4:8; 23:4} At dusk the shepherd was the θύρα through whom they entered the fold to **“lie down and sleep” “in peace”** without **“fear”** of any **“evil.”** The shepherd protected them both against predators that sought to devour them, and their own tendency to wander.

✧ The θύρα is an image of access to indispensable spiritual provision and guaranteed spiritual protection.

■ In verse 9, Jesus proclaims: **“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.”**

{Jn 3:17} This is his purpose in taking on flesh and dwelling among us: **“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world”** – to deliver the world, to preserve it, to make it whole – **“through him.”**

📖 Elsewhere in this Gospel and in his first epistle, John often uses **“the world”** as a derogatory term for evil systems, but in this case it is a positive word. It means all human beings, and with us the Creation.

❓ This begs the two-part question, what has Christ come to save us humans and the Creation from, and what has he come to save us for?

★ The Lord has come to deliver us *from* ignorance, confusion, folly, guilt, bondage to sin and compulsion, alienation from God, estrangement from others, self-hatred, fear of all kinds, despair, futility, bodily decay and mortality, and hell. In short, his work is to save us *from* Death of the body, mind, soul, and spirit. Salvation is being ushered out of death.

★ He has come to deliver us *for* knowledge, insight, wisdom, innocence, freedom, union with God,

reconciliation with others, peace, faith, hope, love, joy, purpose, conformity to the Son’s likeness, resurrection, and eternal life in the kingdom of God. His work is to save us *for* Life of the body, mind, soul, and spirit. Salvation is being ushered into all-embracing, all-encompassing, comprehensive life.

■ Hence, in verse 10 the Savior states, **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”**

“Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.” At least four things stand out here.

✈ 1st, Jesus is making an exclusive claim.

“I am the θύρα” has an emphatic ring to it. **“I am”** implies that others are not **“the gate”** or **“the door.”**

■ In verse 8 Christ explicitly asserts that **“All who have come before me are thieves and robbers.”** This does not apply to genuine teachers and prophets who actually were sent by God. He is talking about those who falsely allege to provide access to abundant life.

“I am the gate,” not the Pharisees. In Matthew 23:13 he berates them: **“You shut the door of the kingdom... in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.”**

“I am the gate,” not any so-called savior who vows to deliver Israel by defeating the Romans. Several have come before, and all they have delivered is violent death.

“I am the gate.” “I am the door.”

✎ 2nd, Jesus is inviting us to participate in his life.

{Jn 6:54, 56} Earlier he announced: **“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.”** This includes partaking of Holy Communion not as cold ritual but as a sharing in Christ. It goes beyond the sacrament to include prayer, worship, and daily acts of discipleship.

{Jn 15:4-5} Later he will teach, **“I am the vine; you are the branches.”** **“Remain in me, as I also remain in you.”** This is the language of intimacy.

True belief is important. Yet life is found not in doctrine *about* the gate, it is in the gate *himself*.

Verbal profession is needed. Yet life is found not in testimony *of* the gate, it is in the gate *himself*.

Righteous works are crucial. Yet life is found not in deeds done *for* the gate, it is in the gate *himself*.

“Whoever enters *through me* will be saved.”

✎ 3rd, Jesus is imploring us to reject death.

■ In verse 10 he cautions that **“the thief”** (anyone else who claims to give life or to teach the way of life) **“comes only to steal and kill and destroy.”** Some are malicious deceivers. Many are ignorant dupes. Regardless, theirs is the way of death.

● {Mt 7:13-14} Jesus is not playing. In the Sermon on the Mount he warns us to **“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”**

It is not just that **“whoever enters through [him] will be saved”**; it is that whoever does *not* enter through him will *not* be saved. Every other **“gate”**—and this can be anything people trust in for abundant life — every other leads to death of the body, mind, soul and spirit. Follow it to the end, and our journey will end in Hell.

“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.”

✎ 4th, Jesus is urging us to keep on entering life.

■ What does he say in verse 9? **“They will come in and go out, and find pasture.”**

This phrasing suggests repetition. Again and again the flock goes out for nourishment. Time after time they come in for protection and rest.

This is not a matter of losing one’s salvation and being saved again; it is that receiving salvation is ongoing and progressive. It is not a punctiliar event that occurs at a single point in time; it is a continuous process that carries on until our glorification.

{1 Co 1:18} That is why the apostle Paul wrote that **“to us who are being saved” “the message of the cross” “is the power of God.”** He did not say, ‘to us who *have been* saved.’

{Mt 24:13} Likewise, **“whoever stands firm to the end will be saved.”** Saving faith does not consist of our belief back on such-and-such a date; it is enduring trust in the present, which becomes the future.

“They will come in and go out.”

‡ Do you ever feel the walls closing in? We need a door to open so that we can step out into fresh air and wide open spaces!

‡ Do you ever stand out in the stormy night, looking through a picture window into a cozy room? We need a door to open so that we can step on into light and life!

And not us alone! Our families, friends, and colleagues need a door. Our enemies need a door. Strangers here and around the world need a door.

■ **“Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.... I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture... I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”**

John 10:7-10 is the word of the Lord.