

ENTERING THE SCENE:

It seems to be getting more and more difficult to tell who is a real leader and who is a “robber/thief”. But Jesus gives us the secret if we but listen. He says a true leader/shepherd, is one whose main goal is to provide our freedom to come in and go out and find pasture: in other words to live full and meaningful lives. If we find that the ones we choose only provide that for themselves at our expense, we have an opportunity to learn and choose differently. And His sheep are quick learners, they aren’t fooled easily. They know His voice. Now listen carefully to His voice and see what you might learn.

John 10:1-10

1 **I tell you the truth**, the man who does not enter the **sheep pen** by the **gate**, but climbs in by some **other way**, is a **thief** and a **robber**. 2 The man who enters by the **gate** is the **shepherd** of his **sheep**. 3 The **watchman** opens the **gate** for him, and the **sheep listen** to his **voice**. He **calls** his own **sheep** by

name and **leads them out**. 4 When he has **brought out** all his own, he **goes on ahead** of them, and his **sheep follow** him because they **know** his **voice**. 5 But they will never **follow** a **stranger**; in fact, they will **run away** from him because they **do not recognize** a **stranger's voice**." 6 Jesus used this **figure of speech**, but they **did not understand** what he was telling them. 7 Therefore Jesus said again, "**I tell you the truth**, I am the **gate** for the **sheep**. 8 All who ever came **before me** were **thieves** and **robbers**, but the **sheep** did not **listen** to them. 9 I am the **gate**; whoever **enters through me** will be saved. He will **come in and go out**, and **find pasture**. 10 The **thief** comes only to **steal** and **kill** and **destroy**; I have come that they may **have life**, and **have it to the full**.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: How good am I at recognizing the shepherd’s voice?

PRAYER: Dear shepherd. With all the confusing and conflicting voices clamoring for my attention it is getting harder to recognize the voices that truly want me to have a full and healthy life. It seems like I am only a worthwhile sheep for what I can produce for the owners of my time and energy. Please help me sort out who or what to pay attention to as I try to live a full and holy life. Amen

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

I TELL YOU THE TRUTH: Today, we might say, listen up this is really important for your well-being.

What is my initial response to someone when they say “listen up”? Does my response depend on who is speaking?



SHEEP: Sheep were very valuable to the life and wellbeing of people in Jesus’ day. They were a source of food, clothing and shelter. There was a strong interdependence between the people and their sheep.

If someone were to call me a sheep today, would I like it? Do I ever experience interdependence with God by way of the shepherd/sheep parables?

GATE: Sheep from many flocks were pastured together in a safe place with a watchman sleeping in the gate.

Is there anyone on watch at the ‘gate’ for me now? If so, who is it?

SHEPHERD: By the time of Jesus, the role of shepherd had changed from the guardian/nurturer of the sheep to the user of the sheep.

Have I ever experienced someone who pretended to be something that they were not? If so, what did I learn from that experience?

THIEF / ROBBER / STRANGER / BEFORE ME: A shepherd was seen as a thief, robber, and a person of dubious character. (See below)

What is Jesus teaching the people/me with this advice?



WATCHMAN: A watchman was the person designated by many shepherds to guard the flocks as they rested for the night. The watchman often had to defend the sheep from predators

Who are the watchmen and women of today?

LISTEN / KNOW: Since the sheep were mixed together for the night, the individual shepherds would use a specific cry to call them out for the days pasturing.

How has my listening to God's voice helped me to know that voice when it calls?

VOICE: A person's voice is like a fingerprint for recognition.

In what ways am I able to hear Jesus' voice in studying scripture?

NAME: Each shepherd had their own mark on their sheep. In smaller flocks they often were also given names.

What does this tell me about Jesus as a shepherd? Do I image myself as a named sheep?

LEADS THEM OUT / BROUGHT OUT / GOES ON AHEAD / ENTERS THROUGH ME: Our faith life is a process where we are led by someone who has gone ahead, who then admits us through their teaching or witness.

Who has or is shepherding me as I deepen my faith? Am I shepherding anyone?

FOLLOW / COME IN AND GO OUT: The sheep are free to come and go in safety as long as they follow their shepherd.

Can I see how living within (follow) Jesus' truth enables me to 'come in and go out' freely?

RUN AWAY: Learning to run from those who have ulterior motives is an important skill.

In what ways do I sense an ulterior motive so that I can 'run away' from it?

DO NOT RECOGNIZE / FIGURE OF SPEECH / DID NOT UNDERSTAND: Jesus uses metaphors or figures of speech a lot in his teaching. Often people fail to recognize or understand right away.

How does a metaphor or figure of speech challenge the listener to go deeper into the truth? How does it protect the one who is not ready yet to hear the truth?

FIND PASTURE / HAVE LIFE / HAVE IT TO THE FULL: Jesus reveals that our lives are created by God to be lives of fullness.

Does the promise of my resurrection enable me to go out and live life fully?

STEAL / KILL / DESTROY: Fear can steal, kill, and destroy our ability to have a full life.

Have I given anyone or anything the power to steal, kill, or destroy my ability to live life to its fullness? How can this scripture help me to recognize that fear and overcome it?

PARALLEL TEXTS: **Jn. 10:1f** // Jer. 23:1f; Ezek. 34:1f; **Jn. 10:4** // Mi. 2:12f; **Jn. 10:9** // Ps. 23:1f; Is. 49:9f;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Acts 2:14, 36-41; [Ps. 23:1-6](#); 1 Pt. 2:20-25; Jn. 10:1-10;

Revised Common Lectionary: Acts 2:42-27; Ps. 23; [1 Pt. 2:19-25](#); Jn. 10: 1-10;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

But the purpose of the shepherd determines the rule and practice. The gatekeeper helps the shepherd, not the other way around. Pg. 109 Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2014. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent. - Madeleine Albright

Good Shepherds are willing to lay down their lives for their sheep. As spiritual leaders walking in the footsteps of Jesus, we are called to lay down our lives for our people. This laying down might in special circumstances mean dying for others. But it means first of all making our own lives - our sorrows and joys, our despair and hope, our loneliness and experience of intimacy - available to others as sources of new life. One of the greatest gifts we can give others is ourselves. We offer consolation and comfort, especially in moments of crisis, when we say: "Do not be afraid, I know what you are living and I am living it with you. You are not alone." Thus we become Christ-like shepherds. Henri Nouwen

Yet tsror in Hebrew means a pebble. In ancient times, shepherds needed a system to keep track of their flocks. On some days, they would go out to pasture with a flock of 30; on others, a flock of 10. Memory was an unreliable way of keeping tabs on the number of the flock. As a result, the shepherd would carry a sling over his shoulder, and in it he would keep the number of pebbles that corresponded to the number in his flock. That way he could at all times have an accurate daily count. When we place stones on the grave and inscribe the motto above on the [stone](#), we are asking God to keep the departed soul in His sling. Among all the souls whom God has to watch over, we wish to add the name--the "pebble"--of the soul of our departed.

Many voices ask for our attention. There is a voice that says, "Prove that you are a good person." Another voice says, "You'd better be ashamed of yourself." There also is a voice that says, "Nobody really cares about you," and one that says, "Be sure to become successful, popular, and powerful." But underneath all these often very noisy voices is a still, small voice that says, "You are my Beloved, my favor rests on you." That's the voice we need most of all to hear. To hear that voice, however, requires special effort; it



requires solitude, silence, and a strong determination to listen. That's what prayer is. It is listening to the voice that calls us "my Beloved." Henri Nouwen

But there are ways in which a leader should not be like a shepherd. Shepherds certainly did not have a universally good reputation! Before YHWH uses shepherd as a self-image in Ezekiel 34, there is a long passage in which YHWH excoriates Israel's shepherds (leaders as well as shepherds) for their neglect of the fold. "My flock is astray on every mountain and on every high hill; my flock has been scattered all over the world; no one bothers about them, and no one looks after them" (Ezek. 34:6). In his analysis of the shepherd metaphor, David Miller reminds us that shepherds were denied civil rights in the ancient Jewish world and that people were not to buy wool, milk, or a kid from a shepherd, because it was presumed that these were stolen (1981,12). That is why the adjective "good" in "the good shepherd" would have been an ear-catching, enigmatic metaphor. When a leader is caring for all, with a special care for the lost and needy and wounded, the leader is being a good shepherd. When the leader has the kind of intimacy with a community that the leader truly knows the members of the community, and the community feels it has a personal relationship with the leader, the leader is being a good shepherd. Pg. 77. Lee. Bernard. *The Future Church of 140 BCE*. NY. Crossroad Pub. 1995.

Spiritual leadership is the leadership of the Good Shepherd. As Jesus says, good shepherds know their sheep, and their sheep know them. There must be a true mutuality between shepherds and their sheep. Good leaders know their own, and their own know them. Between them is mutual trust, mutual openness, mutual care, and mutual love. To follow our leaders we cannot be afraid of them, and to lead our followers we need their encouragement and support. Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd to show the great intimacy that must exist between leaders and those entrusted to them. Without such intimacy, leadership easily becomes oppressive. Henri Nouwen

The act of being God is the act of loving-and this loving creates the world. If we are really children of God, we are capable of entering into this kind of love. In fact, we must fundamentally and centrally be this kind of love, if it is true that we are children of God. Just as we must each be a pure I AM, transcendent of all descriptive predicates, so this very I AM must be a great outpouring Fiat, MAY YOU BE, a radiating love-energy. Our attitude toward all other beings will be the will that they may be, and may be fully, abundantly. A disciple of the Buddha came to him one day and said, "It seems to me that love and friendliness are a great part of the illuminated life." "You are wrong," said the Buddha. "Love and friendliness are all of the illuminated life." Pg. 117. Bruteau, Beatrice. *The Grand Option: Personal Transformation and a New Creation*.

Jesus' natural fear of death assures us that he took on the full human condition. Ernest Becker says, "The human animal is characterized by two great fears that other animals are protected from: the fear of death and the fear of life." See Becker, *The Denial of Death*, p. 53. Jesus also feared life, as we all do. He had to overcome his fear of living life fully, using all his gifts, living with great passion, with all his senses keenly awakened. We fear life because living fully costs so much. It means standing out from the crowd as a unique individual, risking others' censure. While each human has a unique voiceprint and fingerprints, we all fear being unique. We shrink back from both death and life. Once Jesus had transformed these two fears into twin dynamic energies, he was able to continuously give the gift of life. He called himself the bread of life and said he had come that all might have life and have it in great abundance.

Hays, Edward. [The Gospel of Gabriel](#). Forest of Peace Books, Easton, KS. 1996. Pages 239-140.

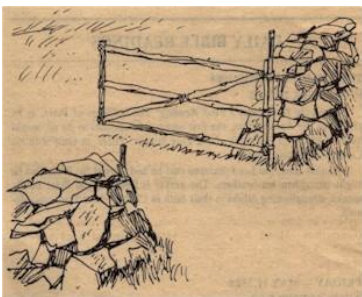
"I AM THE GATE

Gates / Both welcome and forbid / and sometimes / Require a price to pass through. / Considering my whole life / What is BEING SAFE? / What is the price for me / to enter through the gate? / WHOEVER ENTERS THROUGH ME WILL BE SAFE."

"I CAME SO THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE...AND / What gets in the way / of my enjoying my life? / What? / Why / do I / allow it? / For surely / To be fragmented, blunted, diminished, / Is NOT the reason for my existence. / What / might I change / to / HAVE IT MORE ABUNDANTLY."

Halpin, Marlene, Dominican. [Leading Prayer: Plain and Simple](#). Dubuque, IA. Brown Pub. 1990. Page 102.

"The real sin against the Holy Spirit is refusing to recognize, with 'theological' joy, some concrete liberation that is taking place before one's very eyes." (Juan Luis Segundo)



As one who has taught the Gospel of John for more than 40 years, I used to struggle with Jesus' words, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6), because it sounds at first as if Jesus were the exclusive way to God. But as I reflected on it in the context of the Gospel of John, I found that this Gospel of John, I found that this Gospel speaks very little about our way to God and everything about God's way to us and to the whole world. This means that Jesus is "way... truth... life," not because he is the exclusive way to God but because he embodies and articulates God's inclusive way to all of humanity. Paul L. Hammer

In the Middle East some shepherds walk before their sheep and call them with a peculiar cry. Voice recognition is therefore more than simply knowing the voice of the shepherd. All shepherds were viewed as thieves, as men who exposed their women to shame by leaving them uncared for while they pastured the sheep, and as immoral men who found pleasure in sheep while absent from their wives. Pilch, John J. [The Cultural World of Jesus-Cycle A](#). The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN. 1995. Page 76.

For a good understanding of the shepherd metaphor see: Keller, Phillip. A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23. Grand Rapids, MI. Zondervan Pub.. 1970.



What had happened was that which Jesus had often warned his followers to avoid: turning his teachings into a religion like that practiced by the scribes, Pharisees and lawyers. When he commanded his followers to go out to all nations, he was telling them to take his life and light to the cultures of the world. His teaching was not to become a cult or a substitute culture or a reason to separate, chosen people apart from the world-place in which they lived. They were to go to what was there to inform it, purify it from within and live it to the full human dignity and to present it to God, the Father of all peoples and cultures “I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full” (Jn 10:10).

Heaps, John. A Love That Dares to Question: A Bishop Challenges His Church. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans Pub. Col. 1998. . Pages 12-13.

And what is the purpose of this Easter Saturday lifestyle, this closeness to our fellow citizens in the earthly community, however different and distant from us, who are more our real neighbors in Christ that are congenial to us and just like us with whom we happily volunteer to be associated? Of course, in love’s logic, response to human need has its own *raison d etre*, without ulterior goal or external rationale. It is certainly not to liberate and unify them by our efforts and ideals that we seek to love our neighbors as ourselves –as if God’s kingdom were of our own building or its

coming determined by our own schedule. Rather, we love them to manifest a sign that God is lovingly, redemptively at work among them, having become identified with the godless, the godforsaken, and the dead. The goal of mission and of service is not to improve the world and create utopia on earth; it is that the world may believe and know, know that God loves the world and has sent the Son to deliver it from perishing to everlasting and abundant life (Jn. 10: 10). Lewis, Alan E. Between Cross and Resurrection. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. 2001. Pages 456-7.

Leadership (as opposed to tyranny) happens only where there is virtue, and reverence is the virtue on which leadership most depends. Pg. 165 Woodruff, Paul. Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue. NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 2001.

Real life comes to be itself precisely in moving beyond the limits of control and certainty. Trust is integral to real life. We have an inner need to trust, to believe, to live in mutual recognition with others. Interdependency cannot happen without it. This interdependency is energized by the unpredictable and new which occurs when separate beings merge and form a new reality. This is life which comes to itself beyond the predictable, secure, and controllable. Fr. David Bock

The deep knowing that is wisdom arises through the simple act of giving someone or something your full attention.

Attention is primordial intelligence, consciousness itself. It dissolves the barriers created by conceptual thought, and with this comes the recognition that nothing exists by itself. It joins the perceiver and the perceived in a unifying field of awareness. It is the healer of separation. Eckhart Tolle,

Contemplative knowing intuitively things in their wholeness, with all levels of connection and meaning, and perhaps how they fit in the full scheme of things. Thus, the contemplative response to the moment is always appreciation and inherent re-spect (“to look at a second time”) because I am now a part of what I am trying to see. Our first practical and partial observation of most things lacks this respect. It is not yet contemplative. Frankly, when you see things contemplatively, everything in the universe is a mirror.

Richard Rohr

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2014. Pgs. 105-109. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](mailto:Carol.Oberfoell@theark1.com)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2008. Pgs. 73-77. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](mailto:Carol.Oberfoell@theark1.com)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2011. Pgs. 85-88. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](mailto:Carol.Oberfoell@theark1.com)

Mitchell, Stephen. The Enlightened Heart. Harper & Row, NY. 1989. **The Great Way**: Page 46.

Janice Grana Ed. Images. St. Mary's College Press, Winona MN 1976. **A GIFT**: Page 65. **ENDINGS**: Page 83. **EVERY NEW DAY I HAVE A NEW CHANCE** : Page 140

William R. White. Stories for the Journey Augsburg Pub. House, Minneapolis, MN. 1988. **Land of Fools**: Pages 107-8.