

# **I am the Gate (John 10:1-10)**

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*10:00am Fourth Sunday of Easter – 26<sup>th</sup> April 2026*

## **Acts 2:42-27**

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

## **John 10:1-10**

'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 them. 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.

It's nice to imagine the lovely idyllic scenes in the countryside, as spring keeps trying to warm up properly. The Book of Acts offers us one such springtime scene as the fledgling church also tries to get itself going, and apparently with good success. What we are offered is a model for the perfect congregation. According to St Luke (who also wrote the Book of Acts), they were believers in Christ Jesus, giving rise to **'awesome miracles and wonders seen amongst them'**. The apostles were leading, and everyone was following. There were no buildings related issues, no financial problems (because **'everyone had sold their possessions'**), no one was moaning about anything, there were no pressures from the diocese, and most of all it sounds as if they all said yes to going on the rota!

You can read about such comfortable scenery as: **'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.'** Their mission plan was working well as, **'every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.'** **I think that was the first APCM report!**

We can imagine such a place, and perhaps we may *yearn* for the same to be true in our day. History carried the same feeling, in more tumultuous times. If you can remember your sixteenth and seventeenth history, recall how some took to the ships from European harbours to sail west into a new land to build a new church in freedom from persecution. History is littered with attempts to *recreate* such holy gatherings, with small groups breaking away to form new congregations – away from the drag and accumulation of history and tradition. When they do, they base their hopes on these few verses from Acts 2 today.

Amongst all the messiness of human culture, the Church in any land or by any language, has had to decide whether it is to be a pure and holy remnant living in some sense *distant from the world*, or as an integrated yet relative church within society (and that can be very messy). This is all about boundaries – or fences to take from today’s gospel reading. Jesus said, ‘[Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.](#)’

On a number of occasions recently I have found myself describing the relationships of the church to its parish as a *resource*. We in Haslemere Parish, since 2020, have given some clear answers to that question when we have run an NHS vaccination station, hosted Citizens Advice (twice), a hearing clinic, and the work of the Link Community Hub.

**I think that the most important and holy object in any church is the door to the outside world.** Just this last week I met up for coffee with another local parish priest who described his parish situation as like *a set of outside forces that all seemed to be arranged against him*. We may know similar feelings ourselves sometimes. His lament was not about trouble and strife in the congregation, surely no Vicar has ever known that(!), but rather he felt he was battling headwinds that seemed to silently oppose everything he and his leadership were trying to do. You can imagine that it might therefore be tempting to stay on the *inside* of the church door, locked-in like Jesus’s nervous disciples separated from the world. **But as gatekeepers, led by Christ, that is something that we must not do.**

Once again, Jesus said: ‘[Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.](#)’ It’s one of seven ‘I am’ saying in John’s gospel. Allow me to give you a little background as to why Jesus has said this about gates – and to do so I have to go slightly off tangent.

A short while before, Jesus had just healed a man born blind, an affliction understood widely as divine justice upon him or his family. Jesus heals the blind man, and at the same time challenges the religious law by claiming that his blindness was not because this man or his parents had sinned. But people were told to believe that kind of judgement. **Such beliefs allow you to take no responsibility for anyone afflicted**, lest you interfere with God's active judgement. Why go out to help anyone, when you can be well and pure in your own home?

But then Jesus declared something that might sound almost as unreasonable: **'this man was born blind that the works of God might be displayed in his life.'** That takes some understanding. **What Jesus was doing was challenging the doctrine and the law which was being kept penned-in by the Pharisees (or so they claimed).** They had appointed themselves as gatekeepers as to how God might act. You may recall how those same Pharisees then questioned the healed man and his parents – was this a trick from that charlatan Jesus? But they simply tell the truth – **he was blind from birth, and that man Jesus has healed him.** That is not what the Pharisees wanted to hear, thinking themselves the caretakers of the truth. Jesus then goes on to accuse the Pharisees of spiritual blindness themselves.

So, back now to the fields and here is a nice picture of Jesus as the shepherd who is watchful at the gate. The imaginary picture is a sheepfold, not an enclosed church. A thief or bandit could jump over the fence to steal a sheep – that's a problem. **So, Jesus here sounds like top-security, as a guard might be, to protect what is on the inside.** Yet that is not quite the case if we read on to his further words: **'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.'**

**There is nothing to be found in Jesus about staying indoors.** What I read here is not security, it's assurance of Christ's presence on the outside, with us. Do you receive here in church on Sundays, something which somehow remains with you for the rest of the week, as you go outside? I hope so – think about the importance of the door again. **That surely must be something like the point of what we do here.**

This idea of the gate and the door, prompts us to think carefully about ourselves:

- ❖ Are we a welcoming church? Are we an inviting church? Are we a joinable church? Do we share?
- ❖ Can we claim to be a church for all people in a diverse way? Do we understand and speak the common language of society? Are we distinctive?

**All of these are doorkeeper and gatekeeper types of questions.**

Soon we shall have Ascension Day and Pentecost. In earthly terms Jesus prepares to leave, but he handed over to us the role of being shepherds and gatekeepers. We still are. **The gatekeeper is one of the seven I am sayings, can you remember any of the others?** We are to be leaders on the *way*, pointers to the *truth* and herald of new *life*. We are to be *light* in darkness and those living the resurrection life, breakers of *bread* and harvesters of the *true vine* together.

So, the door is under our control – it has two sides to it. We must learn to observe its best Christian use – which is not exclusive possession and internal security for us. It's about our going out and our coming in for others.

Amen