



SPIRIT IN THE DESERT John 10:1-10

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. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” 6 Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

7 So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who came before me [a] are thieves and bandits, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live, move and have our being.

Do you know what it’s like to be huddled, in a secret place hiding from authorities, attempting to focus on the voice of the one speaking, one ear to them and the other listening for enemy footsteps on the porch.

Neither do I, yet this was what Jesus had with his disciples behind closed doors. A conversation where Jesus gives his fearful disciples a metaphor for listening to their inner voice. The Spirit’s voice will not join in being dominated, voices of intimidation or fear.

This voice is like a door or a gate. It will not lead you into an inner life shrunken by despair.

When the journey of our outer lives is fraught with suspected danger or perceived harm, we are not truly living. Understandably we seek security and safety from insecurity in these times. Like the disciples, we become vulnerable to “shepherds” who offer belonging and protection.

My guess is that Jesus would not care for the words of self-proclaimed “shepherds” who have been interpreting these passages. For instance, this quote from a very prominent bible teacher, he says, “The metaphor Jesus uses in “I am the gate,” conveys very simply the gospel truth that the “way in” to salvation is by Him alone. To gain entry, you need only come to Him and ask.”

This interpretation has dominated evangelical teaching for centuries. I work with individuals who have been traumatized into a secret place of their own. Living in fear of this gospel. They wonder, “did God abandon me?” Is my God disappointed with me and waiting at a gate for me to beg to come back to the “way in.?”

I do not read this passage to say someone must ask, but that God calls everyone by name. The Shepherd knows us. What's more important? That we know God or God knows us?

Jesus is not warning the disciples about the 'way in' but providing the way out from the voices who rob you of an abundant life. Those voices are thieves that make their own way into your heart.

In that secret room, the disciples are being taught to discern between the voices they will hear when the earthly voice of Jesus is gone. The voice that spoke freedom into a life dominated by demons, disabilities, accusers, greed, loneliness, and even the bad shepherds became sheep.

Jesus spoke of the voice of the abundant life that calls from the inside out not from the outside in.

The fullness of life that is on the other side of the gate is wisdom, love, compassion, and one embodied by the one who would lay down their life at the entrance during the night.

It is not the exclusive way in; it is an escape out of emotional and spiritual captivity; release for disciples, away from the unfamiliar voices of self-described shepherds attempting to instill fear. These thieves of the good news do not huddle in secrecy they meet in large venues like an army of believers flaunting their exclusivity.

What does Jesus mean when he says his sheep will know the good Shepherds voice?

I can only relate it to the voice of my own father.

My father died of leukemia when I was four years old. I was the youngest of four siblings, so I knew my father only as a toddler and through the stories of my mother and siblings. I may not know what my father's voice sounded like to the ear, but I was taught the voice of his heart.

The environment of love and compassion he provided in our home lingers to this day. The friendships he had with others was welcoming. My mom always said that my dad would come home after meeting somebody and then call him his friend. The way that he interacted with others was his voice. How others knew him and related to him was his voice. He loved to play with his kids, and this was his voice. His voice was in my four-year-old body and is in my children's as well. It influences our devotion to each other. In addition, my dad's love for the good Shepherd was genuine and he showed us the way. We are being called to embody the voice of Jesus as Jesus embodied the voice of his father.

I cannot imagine my dad would ever interpret this scripture passage of Jesus as a bouncer to a private party.

My father's voice was not exclusive; he was an inclusive person of faith. His heavenly Shepherd took over because he grew up without his dad just like me

After dad died, we didn't have a lot of money, but as far as I could tell, we were never in want. My father's voice is still present with us. His kindness, his joy, his love and compassion, resonate with even my children who never got to be with him. His voice is louder now more than ever in the lives of myself and my siblings.

To treat the story of a gate that allows only a few in and calls the rest strangers is not consistent with the life of Jesus as my father would've taught.

There is a way that someone establishes their voice that is easily recognized among a crowd of others. It is not a voice that instills fear as a means of gaining followers or compelling entry. Instead, it is a voice that opens the gate to a larger experience and an abundant life—a larger party.

My father battled leukemia for nearly all of my early years. The 23rd psalm was what he would ask my mom to read with him on a regular basis. This was the voice of his shepherd. As a singing family we started singing a powerful and tender version of the 23rd psalm and it became our anthem. It was the voice of my mother's shepherd as we held hands and recited it as she passed.

Jesus told his disciples huddled in that secret place awaiting his ultimate sacrifice for his friends that there is a voice. It is a divine atmosphere you will not hear with your ears. The voice resonates when others are being treated with compassion, inclusivity, the voice of hope in the midst of grief and loneliness. This voice still lingers in our children and grandchildren as we sing together the 23rd psalm.

It is the voice heard in the Jesus' shield for the woman caught in adultery. The voice heard by the man with the withered arm. The one who was terrorized by demons. The voice of those who protect the innocent and give shelter to those who need grace. The voice of the stranger, the orphan and the imprisoned.

I am convinced that if any "Christian" practice, ritual, gathering, curriculum does not open the heart bigger, love better or devote deeper it might be a thief or a robber. Whether intentional or unintentional, we can see the thief in the voice of anything or anyone that does not resonate in harmony with the welcoming voice of Christ who knows your name.

This life truly is one of abundance and I shall not want.

Amen

Wednesday Respite is a 30-min contemplative service of scripture, prayer, music and a [Spirited Touchpoint](#) by Henry Rojas, spiritual director at Spirit in the Desert.

Touchpoint is a reflection on where God's story touches our life story. It is a short homily based on a biblical story of people in the Old and New Testaments and their relationship with God. Our

spiritual ancestors' experience of God's grace connects with our lives in the present and our relationship with the Divine. Previous Touchpoints are available as [PDFs](#).