

Holy Textures

Meeting Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
Short, easy to use, faith-provoking insights.

John 10:1-10

"Many voices call our name. Can we be like the good sheep in this lesson and recognize and respond to the voice of Jesus calling our name?"

Listed on The Text This Week, www.textweek.com: Contemporary Commentary, Studies, and Exegesis for the Gospel reading.

Year A

Season of Easter

Easter 4

Read the passage at the bottom of this post: [John 10:1-10, The Message](#) or [John 10:1-10, The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

Click here, [John 10:1-10](#), for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this note.

Sermon by the [Rev. Dr. George Hermanson](#), "[Back To The Shepherd \(Redux\)](#)."

This passage uses actual life experiences that would have been very familiar to Jesus' followers - the care of sheep.

The use of "shepherd" was also widely and well established as a positive image to describe the role of God, kings, Moses, and other leaders in their care of the people. (Who are consequently also described as being like sheep - sometimes not so positively!)

Paradoxically, actual shepherds were scorned and believed to be untrustworthy and dishonourable:

- They were smelly;
- They worked at night;
- They worked in the hills among wild animals and wild people (bandits and other outlaws);
- They were away from their homes and women and so did not watch over and guard them as honourable men did.

Nonetheless, in Mediterranean culture, "a good shepherd" was an honourable way to describe a "a good leader."

This passage is full of details about the actual care of sheep:

- "Thief and a bandit" - One of the real roles of a shepherd is to **PROTECT** the sheep from theft, injury (e.g., by falling or getting caught in rocky clefts), attack by wild animals, loss by separation from the flock, and disease.

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- "Sheepfold or pen, fence, and gate" - Sheep were enclosed for safety at night. Enclosures could be in the village, or caves or other structures in the hills.

Often the sheep of more than one shepherd would be enclosed in the same pen. But each shepherd could identify his sheep, and would give each one a name. In the morning, when it was time for the sheep to be separated and taken out to graze, the shepherd would call his sheep out of the combined flock by name.

- "Knowing, naming, calling, hearing" - Another role of the shepherd is to **KNOW** his sheep individually - by name - and be able to call them out of a crowd: to **maintain their relationship directly with him**. In John, "know his voice" does not mean simply recognize; it implies a deep bond, attachment and connection.
- "Leading, following" - A third role of the shepherd is to be brighter than the sheep: to know the landscape in a way they cannot; to be aware of both sources of sustenance and of danger that they cannot; to be able to plan and anticipate in a way that they cannot; to be trustworthy, loyal and caring in a way they are not. In other words, to **LEAD** the sheep.
- "Gate, entering, going out, pasture, saved, abundant life" - And finally, in the last section of the passage, the metaphor changes from role of the shepherd to that of the gate.

Jesus is the passageway - the boundary transition point - through whom we are able to find abundant life. In this context, "abundant life" does not mean "lots of toys." It refers to the quality of life that comes through attachment to Jesus - believing / trusting **into** Jesus; abiding in Jesus; eternal life.

This passage reiterates several major themes in John:

- **Life.** John 20:31 says that the whole purpose of writing down these stories about Jesus is so that we might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and that through believing we may have life in his name. The question of distinguishing between true life and death is a challenge that runs throughout John.
- **Who is Jesus?** What do you make of him? The true identity / nature / character / purpose of Jesus is made known to those who become his followers and are separated from all others. Often his own closest companions do not get what Jesus is saying, requiring him to repeat his explanations. (See verse 10:6)

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- **Bonding.** The purpose of this talking about Jesus is not simply to be better informed **about** Jesus. The purpose is to be **IN** Jesus, just as he is in the Father and the Father is in him.

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Historical background information in this post is drawn primarily from Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John, see link below, pages 179-180.

* [Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina, et. al.](#), Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.

John 10:1-10 (NRSV)

¹ "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 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.

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John 10:1-10 (The Message)

¹ "Let me set this before you as plainly as I can. If a person climbs over or through the fence of a sheep pen instead of going through the gate, you know he's up to no good—a sheep rustler! ² The shepherd walks right up to the gate. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate to him and the sheep recognize his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he gets them all out, he leads them and they follow because they are familiar with his voice. ⁵ They won't follow a stranger's voice but will scatter because they aren't used to the sound of it."

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⁶ Jesus told this simple story, but they had no idea what he was talking about. ⁷ So he tried again. "I'll be explicit, then. I am the Gate for the sheep. ⁸ All those others are up to no good—sheep stealers, every one of them. But the sheep didn't listen to them. ⁹ I am the Gate. Anyone who goes through me will be cared for—will freely go in and out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.

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