

# ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH

## NEW YORK CITY

### **I AM THE DOOR**

**John 10:10**

**Fourth Sunday of Easter, April 13, 2008**

In our Gospel lesson from John 10 is a wonderful chapter in its striking portrait of Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd and of us as His sheep. Those blessed and marvelous assurances of a concerned God, who captures and encapsulates our comings and goings in God's good will, are crowned by a Christ who presents himself as the Door. This portrait has been beloved by Christians from every culture and the evidence abounds in Christian art and literature. Among the Byzantine art and architecture of Ravenna, Italy, on the walls of the burial chamber of Galla Placidia, a sister of one of the early Byzantine emperors, there is a mosaic portraying Christ as the Good Shepherd. He is seated on a low outcropping of rock, holding a shepherd's staff in the form of a cross, while the sheep gather around Him. He strokes the head of one sheep as one sheep looks on and one seems to be wandering away. In the background, water bursts from a rock in the midst of a verdant garden. The whole is composed of the softest shades of blue, green, yellow, and gold. No one who has seen that picture can miss the thought that the one who follows Christ will not lack any good thing. The artist seems to have been saying: *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters, He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake"* (Psalm 23:1-3). Christ the Good Shepherd will provide His sheep with all good things and they will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Throughout the Old Testament and New Testament this beautiful imagery of the Good Shepherd is found. The psalmist wrote: "We are His people, the sheep of His pasture" (Psalm 100:3). And in the word of Isaiah: "He tends His flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart; He gently leads those that have young" (Isaiah 40:11). Mark wrote that Jesus had pity upon the crowds because "they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34). The author of Hebrews spoke of Jesus as the "Great Shepherd" (Hebrews 13:20); and Peter saw Him as the "Chief Shepherd" to whom the under-shepherds are responsible (I Peter 5:4). The image speaks to us of the underlying sympathy between the shepherd and His sheep and of the unfailing love and vigilance of the Great Shepherd.

**Shepherds, Thieves, and Sheepfolds:** In seeking to understand the shepherd parable in John 10 we must take the story in its context. It is to be found in the preceding chapter in the story of the man born blind and in the mistreatment by those who were the leaders of the people. This is obvious because the words of Jesus flow on immediately after His comments about the Pharisees at the end of chapter 9 and therefore are related to them. This means that Jesus had the incident of the blind man in view as He told the parable.

It is evident that the thieves and robbers represent the chief priests and the Pharisees who had been trying to take from Jesus those who had begun to believe on Him, such as the man born blind. To His listeners who are aware that Yahweh is the Shepherd of Israel, Jesus makes a solemn claim: "I am the Good Shepherd." He places Himself in contrast to Israel's religious leaders, who were supposed to be faithful shepherds, but were more like those evil false shepherds described in Ezekiel 34. He is also "the door of the sheep" not the fold. In the Near East a shepherd often slept in the entrance of the fold to guard his sheep. Therefore, His body literally became the door. Jesus is in charge of and cares for the lives of the sheep. To emphasize the access to God He provides, He calls Himself "the door," apart from whom no one enters the fold. "He said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Also, it is wonderful to know that He lays down His life "for the sake of" and "on behalf of" His sheep.

**The Shepherd's Relationship to His Sheep:** The shepherd's relationship to His sheep is one familiarity. There are two kinds of sheepfolds. The first kind of sheepfold was that found in the countryside. It was nothing more than a circle of rocks with a narrow opening into which the sheep could be driven. The other kind of sheepfold was more substantial. This kind was found in the city and small villages and consisted of a room or enclosure with a regular gate. And into such an enclosure many shepherds together would drive their flocks when they returned to the village at night, and at this place the sheep were taken care of by porter. In the morning each shepherd would come to the fold, call his sheep by name, and because the sheep knew their voice, they would respond to his call, and then lead his own sheep out to pasture. This is the kind of sheepfold about which Christ is thinking in this parable.

**A. The Lord Jesus Christ knows His sheep:** Jesus said that the sheep hear or “listen to” His voice. The idea is familiarity the sheep have with the shepherd. In verses, 14-15, we read: “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.” Jesus knows us just as well as He knows His Father; with intimate knowledge. This is one of the most staggering suggestions to be found anywhere in Scripture. There could be no more dramatic expression of intimacy than how the Father knows the Son. But incredibly, Jesus says, “I know my sheep, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.” Jesus knows us in the most profound ways. He knows our past with its failures, its hurts, and he knows our present, also, our unrealized longings. He knows our idiosyncrasies. He calls us by our characteristics. I sometimes wonder if he calls us some of the things we would not want to be called. It is quite possible he affectionately calls us “Grumpy” or “Fearful” or “faithless,” just as we might talk to our sheep if we were shepherds. He knows the deepest part of our lives: “My frame was not hidden from you, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And I Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them” (Psalm 139:15-16).

**B. An Example of Sheep Knowing His Voice:** We refer to John 20, where Mary Magdalene visited the Savior’s sepulcher in the early morning hour. She finds the stone rolled away, and the body of the Lord gone. Disconsolate, she stands there weeping. Suddenly she sees the Lord Jesus standing by her, and ‘knew not that it was Jesus.’ He speaks to her, but she supposed Him to be the gardener. A moment later she identified Him, and says, ‘Rabboni.’ What had happened in the interval? What enabled her to identify Him? Just one word from Him; ‘Mary’! The moment He called His sheep by name she knew His voice.

**“I Am the Door”:** *Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:7-9).* What does the Lord mean by referring to Himself as the door? G. Campbell Morgan in book of sermons from John’s Gospel, relates a beautiful and unique story told to him by Sir George Adam Smith: “He was one day traveling with a guide, and came across a shepherd and his sheep. He fell into conversation with him. The man showed him the fold

into which the sheep were led at night. It consisted of four walls, with a way in. Sir George said to him, "That is where they go at night?" "Yes," said the shepherd, "and when they are in there, they are perfectly safe." "But there is no door," said Sir George. "I am the door," said the shepherd. He was not a Christian man; he was not speaking in the language of the New Testament. He was speaking from the Arab shepherd's standpoint. Sir George looked at him and said, "What do you mean by the door?" Said the shepherd, "When the light has gone, and all the sheep are inside, I lie in the open space, and no sheep ever goes out but across my body, and no wolf comes in unless he crosses my body; I am the door."

That is our Lord's meaning in this passage. Jesus was saying, "I am the living door. (1.) Jesus says that anyone who enters in will be **saved**. (2.) Jesus promises that anyone who enters in will be **safe**. (3.) Jesus promised that they would be **satisfied**. Likewise, to go out to pasture, you must go through me. As the door I am the protector and I am the provider. When you come in the door, you are not only saved, but you are safe. When you go out through me, you go out to pasture. I am the provider. Nobody is coming through that door except the one who comes through me." In the last part of verse 9, Jesus was saying that the saved go in and out and find pasture, which leads to the claim in verse 10: "that they may have life, and have it to the full." Christ provides abundant or "full" life for His sheep. What is abundant life? Many suppose it is an abundance of things. Not so! Money can buy many things, it can even buy a pasture, but it cannot buy satisfaction.

The Bible portrays Jesus as the Great Shepherd leading His sheep into green pasture beside still water, and making sure they have life and abundance, providing everything for their health. To qualify for all these great benefits, is just to be a sheep that follows the shepherd wherever He leads, knowing that the shepherd knows what is best for the sheep.

"I am the door", says Jesus and He also said, "I am the way," and He is. There is no other way to God but through the door. Jesus Christ. If you are already one of His sheep, God wants you to enjoy the benefits of being in His flock. He is the beautiful shepherd. Worship Him in your heart day by day.