

2020.05.03 4<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY of EASTER SERMON

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This week the image that stood out to me in the readings was the gate. And with Jesus totally focused on sheep and gates I thought of my friend Mary Rose O'Reilley and her apprenticeship as a shepherd. Particularly I thought of one experience she had with sheep and gates:

Read from "Barn at the End of the World" pg 77-78:

[Go to: <https://tinyurl.com/yb7yc26p>, in page chooser top right, scroll to page 77, *Dominant Species*.]

How about us? If we are the sheep where are the gates in our own lives, I wondered? How do we recognize them? How often do we refuse to go through the gate, refuse to enter the sheepfold at all? And do we even notice we're doing that? OR are we oblivious to the choices we made, perhaps by default. Choosing by not choosing. You know - kind of like turning a blind eye... Of course we never behave like that ram, refusing to go through the gate forever and then suddenly and arbitrarily, changing out minds and shooting through!

Still, think about it - four times Jesus speaks of the gate. The gate by which we enter. Not the shortcut over the wall or over the fence! And not the gate we turn away from. But what is this gate? For 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews the literal gates of Jerusalem would be a large reality, all 8 of them. Or 12 of them. However many there were they were part of daily life. In the beginning they were to keep marauders and invading armies out. But they also ended up becoming a means to keep out the poor, the seemingly unhealthy, the marginalized... it was the means by which us and them was enforced, made real, lived out...

How about for us? We don't live with visible gates except where we are keeping deer out of our gardens. But what about our invisible gates? the ones we use to keep out the poor, the seemingly unhealthy, the marginalized... And how about the gates inside us that serve to keep out thoughts we don't want to think. Ideas we don't want to contemplate. Opinions we don't want to make space for. And then there's the gates we might really want to find, the ones that will lead us into the sheepfold where we can know we are safe, watched over, beloved.

I think one of the things Jesus is saying to us, today is this: SEE THE GATE. Be awake. Be listening. Be watching. be both shepherd and sheep. Awaken to the ways in which you are veering away from my gate. Listen for the sound of my voice so you may know where your path is, the one that leads you to my gate, into my sheepfold.

In the world we're living in right now we might really be wondering about that gate. It's a different world now, isn't it. Six months ago if we'd been granted a glimpse of these past two months would we even have believed it? So much is different. So much that we have to consciously be aware of. So many questions to ask ourselves - should I wear a mask in the grocery store? Am I putting others at risk if I don't? And how about those folks who are rebelling against social distancing... am I supposed to love them? What would that look like? Some of you may have kids unable to work and worried

about feeding *their* kids or losing their homes. Some of you might have family members living in care homes and concerned for their welfare. And some of you might have family who are coping with end-of-life and other health challenges that are completely unrelated to the pandemic and oh so complicated in these circumstances. So you might simply want to know - where is the gate, oh Lord? Show me your gate! And tell us - how do we make sure our own societal gates aren't being used to exclude those who are most in need?

Richard Rohr quoted Eco-theologian Thomas Berry this week, who wrote "the universe is so amazing in its interrelatedness that it must have been dreamt into being." He also says "our situation today as an earth community is so desperate—we are so far from knowing how to save ourselves from the ecological degradations we are a part of—that we must dream the way forward. We must summon, from the unconscious, ways of seeing that we know nothing of yet, visions that emerge from deeper within us than our conscious rational minds."

This is what we must call on to find our gate, the gate that leads us towards God, that leads us inward to a life that has the dearest deep down meaning, to the path of Christ, the path of loving kindness, the path of emerging light, the path of life that is the wisest and the truest and most sacred. The path that leaves you! laughing with delight, amazement, gratitude... for the great abundant miracle which is our Creator God.

What it comes down to is this - we can lean into our God. We can listen into our own hearts, for the whisper of God's word beating, resonating, affirming. And in that careful listening we can find the gate that is ours to open, to step through, the one gate, the narrow gate that leads us to the Spirit's wide grace.

We can pray with the poet Wendell Berry:

O Thou, far off and here,  
 whole and broken,  
 Who in necessity and bounty wait,  
 Whose truth is light and dark,  
 mute though spoken,  
 By Thy wide grace show me  
 Thy narrow gate. (from the poem To The Holy Spirit)

Let us pray exactly that:

O God, Three-in-One, Creator, Christ, Holy Spirit,  
 by thy wide grace show us they narrow gate  
 that we may enter in and be one with thee and all those beloved of thee:  
 the entire world, light and dark, whole and broken, loud and mute  
 Show us they path of love and light into our common dream in union with your  
 beloved Creation. Amen.