

May 3, 2010 Gatekeepers – Based on John 10:1-10

Prayer:

My wife and I love our home here in Peachland. We have all the comforts we need. Our residence was renovated by carpenter extraordinaire H, whom most of you will know, just before we moved in. And the view of Okanagan lake and surrounding area is magnificent. An added bonus, we live in a gated community. That keeps the peddlers away and for the most part, the crime element is also excluded. Yeah!

Unlike the time set out in Luke's gospel, we have an "automatic gate keeper." We just need to press the remote button on our commander or alternately type in your pass code (which I often forget thus creating an embarrassing moment) to open the gate. It closes immediately behind us. Very slick. Most of the riff raff who would try to come into the subdivision are kept out. Thank-you very much!

Of course, there were no electronic gates in Jesus' time and so someone had to be there to protect the flock. Without a gatekeeper, the precious lambs and sheep would be stolen or perhaps attacked by wild animals. Someone had to stay all night before the shepherd came back in the morning. Someone had to look after the sheep as they slept inside their enclosure. That would be an essential service even these days.

Today's modern gatekeepers are of a different sort. They are sentries at military check points and boarder crossing guards. They are government policies that keep unwanted refugees out and rules that put barriers in place for immigrants. They are laws based on ignorance and fear, that prevent equality for women and same sex marriage.

It is unfortunate that we need gates and gate keepers at all really. Jesus would rather have had it that way. He would have said, "let everyone in, everyone is welcome." "You are all accepted and cherished regardless of your history, where you came from, who your friends are, or who you love. He would have preferred it that way, which is why his offer was universal, **"whomever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture."** Yes, even former bandits and sheep rustlers would be welcome, if of course they changed their ways.

Those that follow Jesus and live in his light know what the offer is. When Jesus is in our midst, when he comes into the sheepfold, we experience the presence of the living God. And when we let ourselves be surrounded by that presence; we feel secure. We are like the sheep in John's gospel message, we recognize the voice of the shepherd, it is

known to us, it is our guide and protector, we follow willingly. That is a voice we can call out to in our times of greatest despair or doubt, our times of greatest anxiety and fear. We are calmed and reassured.

I am the gate for the sheep says Jesus in this gospel message. **“Those who came before me are thieves and bandits.”** The sheep didn’t listen to them he says. Neither should we.

In those times of course Jesus was not speaking about actual thieves who would pluck a newborn lamb from its mother or rob a traveller of a few possessions. His message is much broader. The bandits and thieves are those with power who would rule through manipulation and force. They would rob not only one’s possessions but one’s freedoms. Kings, governors and even members of the priestly order were not above treachery and deceit to maintain control or standing. Watch out for that Jesus says through this metaphor. My sheep, you, my people, my beloved should not fall for such lies. God’s kin-dom has more to offer than this.

We are all pretty seasoned when it comes to impossible promises made by politicians. We don’t sit idle and condone corruption. We don’t accept violence against women or racial or ethnic prejudice. We tend to ignore false guarantees, and exhortations from inflamed egos, We have a voice and we don’t hesitate to use it. Thankfully, we have freedom of speech and we exercise that. We ourselves can be pretty good gatekeepers when it comes to it.

I do wonder though, if at times we are a little like that security gate at my townhouse. Do we sometimes only yield to those whom we feel have the “right stuff” to be admitted to our churches, or to be accepted to our communities and neighbourhoods? Do we only accept as our friends those who speak the same language, have the same politics or have the same interests? Do we intellectually reject someone who might be less educated or judge someone as inferior because of their background? For centuries churches have been condemning one another for our different theological beliefs, forgetting that there is only one God.

At times it seems to me like we require people to know the correct password to enter our circles. “You understand don’t you that you have to believe such and such if you want to be part of us.” “You know “those” people have a history of being dishonest.” “Look at those women all dressed the same, its very odd don’t you think?” “Look at that guys hair, its purple. And the women with him, those are outrageous tattoos aren’t they.” Gatekeepers in these cases hold on to their keys tightly. There will be no entry.

There is good reason for gates I suppose. Gates are good if you have a puppy you want to keep in the yard or a toddler that might run out onto the street. Gates are good when strategically placed at the outlet of a lake to control flooding. Gates are unfortunately necessary at some retirement homes to protect forgetful seniors from walking out into the freezing winter night by themselves. And I wish it wasn't so, but gates are needed to in some prisons to protect citizens. But gates can be misused.

Gates can be used to prevent human interaction and relationship building. They can be used to say no to sharing our resources, our medical systems and our technology. They can be used to prevent offering a hand-out to the needy and a hand-up to the fallen.

Jesus was a gate keeper but not that kind of gatekeeper. He offered the opportunity for a new beginning, a new start for anyone and everyone. Come to me and you will have life, and have it abundantly, to paraphrase John's message from this morning. Anyone can have a fresh start. Anyone can come through the gate into God's home. Anyone can find a new pasture.

But even Jesus had a kind of a gate code, a kind of password. Believe in the spirit of goodness, compassion, and acceptance. Be tolerant of our differences and don't judge. Above all, Love one another, as I love you. That's the code, know that and you will see a way to the new Kingdom.

That kind of Gate code I think we can all deal with.

Let's be like Jesus opening out gates widely to all who would want to come in, all those who would want to be accepted for who they are. Come on in, come on in and just be.

Thanks for listening this morning.

Amen