

Tarves Parish Church - Sunday 3 May 2020



“I am the gate for the sheep” John 10:7

Read the following hymn of praise slowly, focussing on the meaning of the words.

Psalm 23 The Lord's my shepherd

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| <p>1. The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not
want
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green: he leadeth me
The quiet waters by.</p> | <p>4. My table Thou hast furnished
In presence of my foes;
With oil Thou dost my head anoint
And my cup overflows.</p> |
| <p>2. My soul he doth restore again;
And me to walk doth make
Within the paths of righteousness
Even for his own name's sake.</p> | <p>5. Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me
And in God's house forevermore
My dwelling place shall be.</p> |
| <p>3. Yea, though I walk through death's
dark vale,
Yet will I fear none ill
For thou art with me; and thy rod
and staff me comfort still.</p> | |

Bible Reading St 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. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They 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. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Reflection

In that passage Jesus says I am the gate or door for the sheep and then again simply I am the gate or door (both are correct translations from the Hebrew). How are we to understand this saying? And what significance does it hold for us today? Perhaps we are glad of the doors and gates that keep us safe in lockdown. Or perhaps there are times when these doors and gates feel more like barricades keeping us prisoner or preventing us from entering the homes of loved ones, friends or neighbours or even our church buildings. And we long to break them down. And once again go freely out and in. And I’ll come back to this. But first let me tell you a story.

As most of you are aware we have had two puppies join the manse in the space of a year. Last year we Melville arrived, as an 8 week old golden retriever puppy. He is our fourth retriever so we thought we knew all we needed to know about puppy-proofing the house and garden... as it turned out we had forgotten quite a lot in ten years!

Over the course of the winter of 2018/19 Sean had been busy building raised beds in a section of the manse garden so that we could grow some fruit and vegetables. To protect these beds and their contents from the unwanted attention of dogs he put up a piece of fencing and fixed an old rusty metal gate that we found lying abandoned in the garden. Unfortunately within 48 hours of his arrival Melville discovered he was small enough to get through between the railings in the gate. So we hurriedly blocked them up with a piece of netting. Then he discovered the fun of digging and managed to tunnel his way under the gate – until we blocked that off too. But woe betide us if we forgot to shut the gate - he was into the vegetable area like a shot enjoying the wooden beds, the smells, the vegetation, building himself a nest in the midst of it all!

Eventually we were sure we had made the vegetable patch puppy-proof. Until Spring of this year when Magnus the Westie pup arrived.... well! Last week he found a new way into the vegetable garden and encouraged Melville to follow him. There the partners in crime spent a happy few minutes wreaking absolute havoc! Whether we will get any strawberries at all this year remains to be seen. And trying to get hold of replacement garden canes to support the vegetables has been a real challenge during lock down.

For Melville and Magnus it seems that that old rusty gate to the vegetable patch leads into puppy heaven – and they are determined to find their way in there! I share that story with you because surely it is the picture of a gate into heaven that lies behind the saying of Jesus, “I am the gate”.

In the bible doors and gates are mentioned many times and often they relate to entering or accessing the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. We might think of the challenge of entering the kingdom by the narrow door. Or, perhaps more reassuringly of the promise, knock and the door will be opened to you. Or the words of that Easter hymn about Jesus himself

*There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin
He only could unlock the gate of heaven
And let us in.*

In the bible the opening of that gate or door into heaven leads to two things – truth and life. First of all the person for whom the gate is opened is offered a new insight into heaven or eternity or life beyond the present. That person catches a glimpse of a new truth about God and his purposes for the world and the future. But the opening of that gate permits two way traffic. So the second thing that the opening of the gate does is to allow God's life to flow out into the world. In John's Gospel these two things, truth and life come together in Jesus. So Jesus is not only the one who opens the gate but he is the very gate or door to heaven. In him we see God's life and love at work and he promises to share this life with us now and for all eternity.

It is perfectly natural to long for a time when the physical doors and gates are once again open to us. But in the midst of that longing, perhaps these doors and gates that are keeping us safe could also be reminders to us of the door and gate to heaven that we find mentioned so often in the bible. Let us pray that Christ who is that gate will open up for us fresh glimpses of the future which God desires and this world sorely needs. And let us carry in our hearts the words of the psalmist

*The Lord shall keep thy soul
He shall preserve thee from all ill
Henceforth thy going out and in
God keep forever will.*

Prayers for Others

Suggestions for prayer

- The NHS, its staff in hospitals and GP practices as well as the other emergency services and volunteers
- Scientists and others engaged in the struggle against Covid-19
- The Government and Scottish Parliament as they seek to manage the pandemic
- Those suffering from or bereaved by the corona virus
- Family, friends and neighbours, those most affected by the lock-down
- Other people and situations who are in your hearts today.
- The Church that we might offer a faithful witness to Christ through this time
- Crossreach and in particular their work with the elderly and vulnerable adults

You might like to bring your prayertime to a close by saying the Lord's Prayer

Our Father,
Who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
 Give us this day our daily bread
 And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil
 For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever,
 Amen

A Blessing

May God's blessing surround you each day
 As you love him and walk in his way
 May his presence within guard and keep you from sin
 Go in peace, go in joy, go in love.

Notices

The minister is available to help with any pastoral emergencies. Tel 851295

If you are aware of anyone experiencing particular difficulty during this time please contact Ruth Tel 851887

Crossreach

An urgent assistance appeal newsletter from Crossreach, the Church of Scotland's Social Care Arm. Details are to be found on the website <https://www.justgiving.com/crossreachchurch/donate>. Please consider giving and pray for their work with the elderly and vulnerable adults at this time.

Community Bible Experience

We will be starting to read part of the Old Testament together on Monday 4 May following an 8 week reading plan. There will be regular meetings for discussion on zoom on a Wednesday evening beginning Wed 13 May – for a book, a reading plan, details of the Zoom meeting or any other questions please contact Alison Tel 851295. You can join in at any time!