Sermon John 10:1-10 CCSV 2020

“ I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and come out and find pasture.” That’s whatJesus said in our Gospel reading. He was using the image of the shepherd and his sheep- and their being kept in a sheepfold at night- so that predators could not harm them-and robbers not steal them. A family could have a sheepfold-for it’s own flock- a village could have a sheepfold to shelter a number of flocks……in both cases there was a gate-and a gatekeeper

* Whose job was to let only the shepherd (s) enter.

+++ But there was a third sheepfold-called the “pasture sheepfold”. When a flock was grazing in an area- too far out to return before nightfall to its family or village sheepfold-there were some “pasture sheepfolds” established in a few places ahead of time…Picture a level ground -surrounded by a thorn or rock hedge. But there was no gate. When all the sheep were settled down-the shepherd lay down across the opening for the night. So he was not only the shepherd -but the gate- and the gatekeeper.

+++ The shepherd knew each sheep in his flock by name- and his special call was the only one to which they responded- he led them out to pasture and they followed- his job was to protect them- and feed them- so that each one- and the whole flock- could grow healthy-and give good milk -and wool.+++ What the shepherd does for his sheep-protection and growth-Jesus will do for us-if we want him to. He is the shepherd-the gate- and the gatekeeper. He holds the key to opening the gate into God’s presence – he is the gate through which we must pass – through his gift of the Holy Spirit- he guides and supports us- as we learn to be true members of his flock. His offer of salvation is both an invitation not only to love him- but to join others who love him-to form a fellowship of believers-of disciples-who love each other….. that’s his flock- and that’s what we are at Christ Church SV- a flock with Jesus as our shepherd.

+++What kind of flock is this to which we are invited? Come back with me 2000 years. It’s two months after Passover and the Resurrection-during which Jesus appeared to his disciples at least ten times- and during which he spent many hours teaching and training the apostles- for their coming ministry. They are now back in Jerusalem for the Feast Of Weeks – and in a very spectacular way they receive His promised gift of the Holy Spirit. Standing with them-Peter-that formerly impetuous and cowardly disciple-delivers a blockbuster sermon about the Good News of Jesus- and 3,000 believers are baptized and become the nucleus of a dynamic new community of faith. The gift of Jesus- the Holy Spirit-gave Peter the courage-power and skill- to ‘go public’-to say something worth saying- as God’s messenger to the crowd. Many- not all-were brought to the faith – by the invitation to repentance and forgiveness -and formed a new flock for Jesus the shepherd.

+++ The Book of Acts gives us a description of life among these new believers. ++First and foremost- they absorbed the teaching of the Apostles…..that first sermon of Peter’s was only the beginning- now they can learn and understand the real meaning of the Good News-through the Holy Spirit to get to personally know and love Jesus……and as a community-to keep straight what He was all about.

++ Second-they were a very close fellowship- perhaps the real miracle of Pentecost was that such a diverse crowd of people- could so quickly become a unified body of believers. This was a fellowship which went beyond the bounds of conventional friendship-or even a common cause….a fellowship which day in and day out-could feel the intense togetherness -and unstoppable power- of the Holy Spirit. A fellowship which did the unheard of act- of sharing their belongings -so that no one would be without.

++ Third-they engage in the ‘ breaking of bread’ in their homes. Eating together was a mark of solidarity and deep friendship -where the usual social barriers were broken down

Each dinner was a time of warm and joyful expression of their fellowship. In good Jewish fashion-the blessing at the table-including prayers about Jesus-meant eating together was a sacred activity. Here we must note that there is no suggestion that this is a new religious ritual- this is not the Holy Eucharist- that came many decades later

++Lastly- the fellowship prayed together. In groups they prayed in the Temple. In groups they prayed in the outlying synagogues. In groups they prayed unique ‘Jesus prayers’ such as the Lord’s prayer- and others as they developed. Prayer was the foundation underlying their fellowship and their faith.

+++ Astounding things happened to this new community –

+ there were many ‘miracles and wonders’ by the Apostles

+ as a dynamic, and happy fellowship- they were such a likeable group of people- that the general population -with the exception of the religious establishment-welcomed them with good will.

+ each in his or her own way- with exuberance-and the embodiment of the Holy Spirit- told others the Good News-

with the result that the growth of the new community was a ‘daily phenomenon”- which continued for many years.

*All of that was a picture of the early church -the new flock of Jesus-in a new fold…..a fabulous flock -in a great fold !*

+++ Over the years Audrey and I have been blessed by being members of Jesus’ flock -his church- in ten Canadian and American cities- plus short-term fellowship in 25 other parishes. And we have learned that any place-any event-any circumstance-where Jesus believers gather in worship or fellowship- is a ‘fold’ of the Lord- where the Good Shepherd is always with us – where the Holy Spirit is standing by to help us build a fellowship of love and service.

Wherever I am-wherever you are-wherever we are together, physically or virtually- there we will find Jesus-because each one of us is precious to him……sometimes I find this hard to believe; I’m like a grain of sand in the earth-and the earth is like a grain of sand in the universe-and yet the creator of it all- loves, protects and cares for me-and for you- and for us together -even on the Internet.

+++ Without the shepherd- the sheep will perish. Without Jesus –we may seem to live – but we will perish- because we are unable to be truly-fully-freely human.

Jesus said, “ I Have come that you might have life and have it abundantly. “ Webster’s dictionary defines abundantly as ‘ fully sufficient’ –plentiful to overflowing’. +That’s life with Jesus ! fully sufficient – plentiful to overflowing.

+ Life with Jesus means life the way God created us to live. Life with Jesus means a happy life – even when times are difficult or sad. Life with Jesus is exciting –walking with Jesus anything can happen – and you don’t have to be afraid – because there’s no risk while he’s with you. Life with Jesus is adventurous – he can take you into experiences you would never dream of. He can conquer all our feelings of doubt-fear-anger-hat-stress-guilt-shame depression…..give them to Jesus and he will share them with you –and the Holy Spirit will give you the ability to work them through with confidence and hope. Through him we can enjoy the peace which passes all understanding….through him we can acquire the strength to resist the temptations Satan constantly throws in front of us. Through him-He gives us what the world cannot give – he gives us life abundantly - AMEN .