

Reflection on the Scripture: John 10:1-10

[\[The video of the reflection.\]](#)

When the people listening to Jesus that day didn't get the idea of the sheep not recognizing the Good Shepherd's voice, Jesus explained it another way. Jesus said *I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.* (John 10:9) And there's something buried in there that I would never have understood before the last seven weeks with Covid-19. The phrase "come in and go out" was well-known back then. It described a life that is absolutely safe. When you can go in and out without fear, then your country is at peace, law and order reign and you are perfectly secure.¹ That is the description of the abundant life offered by the Good Shepherd.

We can't go in and out without fear right now. We have to stay away from our neighbors, from our own kids and grandkids. Our groceries are suspect. We have this whole rigamarole we have to put on to pump gas. We can't go to our favorite restaurants or to any restaurants. We don't dare get sick, because the last place we want to be right now is the emergency room, a place we always relied on before.

So does that mean Jesus isn't with us? I don't think so. Because they couldn't come in and go out back then, either. They were living in an occupied land. Taxes were through the roof. Infant mortality was high. Women died in childbirth all the time. The diseases which would tear through a community make Covid-19 look like nothing. Jesus' argument was that by following him, by believing in him, a kingdom could come into being where everyone, all the sheep in the sheepfold, could come in and go out. Those who lived by Jesus' ways would build a community where all were safe and secure.

It's not just a fantasy, a dream that will come at the end of times. We experience it now. Think about what happens when we recite Psalm 23. We recite Psalm 23 and we get less anxious. We are comforted. We are eased. I include it in our worship services often enough, I hope, that you have it memorized. If not, tape it up near your sink and wash your hands while reciting it. It will take more than 20 seconds, but you'll learn it by heart.

There is something in Psalm 23 that speaks to us.² Not because we are professional shepherds, but because we think we know what it is like to be sheep. We're constantly aware of what we're wanting. And it would be so nice if

¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*. Vol. 1. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 59.

² Joseph S. Harvard, "Preaching the Easter Texts: Can I Get a Witness?." *Journal For Preachers* 37, no. 3 (2014), 7.

someone could just say “green pastures over here, still waters over there, follow me and you’ll be all set.” We’re pretty clear about how miserable it feels to go through the darkest valley and we would so appreciate someone there with something to keep us on track (the staff) and something to beat off whatever wants to attack us (the rod). The rod and staff were both key tools for shepherds.

So when Jesus explains about the good shepherd, even with basically no knowledge of shepherding, we get it. We want to be shepherded well. Jesus wants to be sure people understand that the sheep know the voice of their shepherd.³ The sheep *need* to know the voice of their shepherd. Because there are all those thieves and bandits and strangers calling out to the sheep and distracting them, confusing them.

The thieves and the bandits call out to us and try to convince us that we don’t have abundant lives. That we need more and they are the ones who can get it for us, for a price. We have pretty abundant lives even if we have to keep apart from those we love. The grocery stores are full of food, even if there are some bare shelves. The gas stations have plenty of fuel. The electricity and internet are still humming along.

Part of why we can’t come in and go out is because we’re taking care of the other sheep. We’re trying so hard to not spread this virus around. We’re trying so hard to keep the emergency rooms free for the people who have gotten caught when the virus *climbed in by another way* (John 10:1). But the thieves and bandits who want to lead us away from the Good Shepherd would really prefer we not notice that.

The dark shadow of the pandemic is helping us realize that even with all the things we can’t do, we still have pretty good lives. We will get to the other side of this pandemic and we will come in and go out, but we need to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd. Take care of each other, love each other, see what you can do to help others feel the way you do when you recite Psalm 23. See what you can do to help others hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, even if it echoes through you. Because the voice of the Good Shepherd is still calling. It’s just calling differently in the time of pandemic than it has before.

³ Karoline Lewis, *John: Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentary*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 139.