

I am the Gate, sermon by Rev. R. Randy Day, April 26, 2026

Scripture Readings: Acts 2: 14a, 42-47 and John 10: 1-10

The Pharisees had a hard time understanding what Jesus was saying as he talked about the sheep and retold the story. It's worth taking some time to dwell in this passage—even though, as Al Towle, our Scripture reader today, said, it's a very familiar one to us. So, let's take a crack at it.

Jesus is talking about the sheep who will follow the shepherd and listen to his voice. One of the key themes of this service this morning—we see it in the prayers and the call and certainly the Scripture—is our ability and our willingness to listen.

Some of you are teachers, and you spent a lot of time with your students, or with your children and grandchildren, talking about the need to listen, the importance of listening. Does a choir not listen to the director during rehearsals? (I don't know—I've not come to this rehearsal, and I'm not asking you to answer) but when we see a leader, one of the first things we do is listen, to see if we can understand. And that's what we're talking about here.

Jesus says that the sheep understand the voice of the shepherd, and when the shepherd moves on out, the sheep follow. And the sheep will not follow someone whose voice they do not understand.

Secondly, it's important for us to understand that the shepherd knows the names of the sheep—knows the sheep. So in these human terms, what Jesus is saying is that he knows us. He knows each and every one of us. He knows the joys and concerns that are weighing on you or lifting you up, as the case may be, as you gathered here today.

None of you are exactly the same as you were a week ago. Some concerns go, some joys come. We're all facing different things in our lives, and it changes day by day, week by week. The essence of this passage is that Jesus understands we're not alone, we're not isolated—we're part of that flock. Christ matches us, matches our joys, matches our concerns, in the very deepest sense.

He goes on to say, "Whoever enters by me will be saved." So, there's a lot of movement in Christian life. He's talking about coming in and going out, coming in and going out of that gate. There's movement in Christian life. We are not just sitting on our Christian sofas doing nothing, but we're out there engaging with people.

We hear the voice of God through prayer, through study, through meditation, and through the persons with whom we are serving. We hear their conversations. When Brad and I went to the food center two or three weeks ago, we met a lot of people. We heard what their ministry is like. And those of you who went to Hyannis homeless worship and meal, you listened to the folks who came for the lunch. We engage with people. And when we're doing that—when we're doing that—we're hearing the voice of God. We're hearing the voice of Jesus, our shepherd.

So the interesting thing in this Scripture is this movement in and out, in and out. And yet it's important—even to this day—in the Middle East, there are still shepherds, and in rural areas they still practice this protocol with the sheep. The sheep know the voice. You can mix flocks together in a large pen, and when it's time to take your sheep out to the green pastures, you walk out and you use your voice, or some familiar sound, and they'll follow you out the gate to the pasture. The other sheep, who don't know your voice, aren't going to go anywhere. They'll stay there, awaiting their shepherd.

Some of you grew up on farms, some in cities and high rises. I know this whole thing about sheep—we hear a lot of passages about sheep. John goes on and on about sheep because Jesus used these illustrations often.

We say sheep aren't very smart. It seems to me they're pretty smart if they hear the voice of the shepherd and know when to go out and when not to. If they stay there, they're not going to eat. So they're pretty smart.

But at other times, there are sheep that just don't get it. They wander away. They get trapped on ledges. They get stuck in ditches. We've been over this many times. And that's not so different from us as human beings.

So, I don't want us just thinking about sheep way back then, but about us right now. There are times we make bad decisions. That's getting stuck in a ditch, getting stuck on a ledge. We wander off—wander off from our faith, from our community, from our family. All kinds of things happen. But it doesn't make us so different.

And the point of the Scripture is that Jesus is going to be with us—especially when we get in trouble, especially when we wander away. There are ways we are pulled back to the shepherd.

It's worth noting that in the passage just before this, in chapter nine, Jesus heals the blind man and says his blindness is not the result of sin. His disability does not make him less of a person. In fact, it is through his blindness that the power of God is revealed. So Jesus is saying, at one point you can't see, but you will receive the glory of God, the grace of God, the love of God. And in this passage, it's not about the eyes—it's about the ears. Are we able to listen? Do we hear the voice?

He's using simple illustrations to communicate—not just to the Pharisees, but to the regular people of that day who knew something about gatekeepers.

I read a lot of commentaries this week, and I ran across Reverend Dr. Leah D. Schade, a seminary professor and ordained minister. She points out that Jesus is reflecting on the writings of the Hebrew scriptures.

Jeremiah cried out, “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, says the Lord.”

And Ezekiel said:

“Woe to you, shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally... My sheep wandered all over the mountains... and no one searched or looked for them.”

So Ezekiel got that off his chest. He's talking about leaders taking care of themselves, but not the flock.

Jesus evokes this prophetic imagery when he points out that the people are following him—not the religious leaders—because they do not recognize their voices, but they do recognize his.

This commentator says Jesus recognizes that you cannot build the beloved community without disrupting the well-oiled gears of imperial power. And we know what happened on Good Friday. Power does not like to be challenged.

“When they come for your sheep, swing the gate closed. When they dress up their bombs with biblical language, declare God's judgment upon all. When they pollute the pastures with pesticides, proclaim the protection of God's order. When they desecrate the ponds of Cape Cod with plastics, proclaim the protection of God's creation.”

You read the E-news—you saw Brad's piece. MCC is recognized as a green church. We're on record to care for God's creation. There are questions coming before the community—you each decide on your own—but we can pray.

Our Gospel emphasizes that into this depressed, demoralized setting—under Roman oppression and economic hardship—Jesus came and said, “I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly.” For many, this is a favorite passage. To have life abundantly—through music, flowers, fellowship, even coffee hour. Not in a stingy way, but abundantly. A table is set before us in the presence of our enemies. Our cups overflow.

But we must be alert, because we too are gatekeepers.

Jesus is both shepherd and gatekeeper. And that’s an important job. I think back to my childhood on the farm. My job was to open the gate for my grandfather’s tractor—and then close it before the animals got out. Why? To protect them—from wandering into the road—and to keep thieves out. Whose voices are we listening to? The gatekeeper matters.

It’s not easy today. There are many voices. My phone even tells me each week how much time I’ve spent on it. We hear about everything—the Red Sox, world events—we know a lot. That’s good. But we also have to separate what is true from what is not.

I want to share parts of a story I read yesterday, from a New York Times editorial titled *My Daughter Died of Measles*:

“When my daughter Renee, my firstborn, was five months old, she spiked a fever... She was diagnosed with measles... That was 2013, and Manchester, England, where we lived, was experiencing a measles outbreak that resulted in more than 1,000 suspected cases. A 1998 study by a British doctor, Andrew Wakefield, linked the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine to autism had caused vaccination rates to plummet. The study was later retracted and Mr. Wakefield stripped of his medical license, but the damage had been done.

“Within a week, she seemed to be back to normal... What I didn’t know was that measles can have long-term complications... In 2023... she had seizures... her brain was swelling... She stopped talking, stopped eating... Her last food was cotton-candy and an Oreo donut... She was diagnosed with a rare, fatal complication of measles... On September 25, 2023, she took her last breath, nine days before her 11th birthday.”

In January this year, Britain lost its measles elimination status... In the United States... measles is spiking... the highest rates in three decades. This is a critical ethical issue. Whose voices do we listen to? It’s not easy separating fact from fiction. We have a tougher job today than we did ten years ago. We need our minds, our spirits, our hearts, and our souls engaged—so we know what is right and what justice issues to embrace. There are many. Why should children die of preventable diseases when God has worked through scientists and doctors to provide healing?

We are thankful for these gifts. To turn away from them may mean listening to the wrong voices—letting something slip through the gate.

I close with this: “I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep... The hired hand sees the wolf coming and runs away... The wolf snatches the sheep and scatters them.”

The wolf—like the thief—destroys and scatters. But the good shepherd does not run away. The good shepherd knows us. Our task is to know the voice of the good shepherd—so we follow that voice and not be confused by others.

It’s a high calling. But that is what is before us. God be with you. Amen.