

Jesus the Gate

Jesus the gate, Jesus the door, Jesus the portal

What translation have you heard before? In English, these words have different nuances to me. I don't call my house's entry the "front gate." And I don't call my key the "portal key."

Greek, the language of John, θύρα "Thura" is all of these words - and also an entrance, an opening, an opportunity. Anything that is a gap. So Jesus' stone before the tomb closes the thura. The disciples hide behind a closed thura.

A different word, pyle πύλη, and its forms refer to city gates, vestibules, things that fold or swing shut.

We tend to translate John here as the second Greek word, that is, a gate that opens and shuts, rather than the actual word used, which is Greek for an opening. We do this because our sheep are kept in pens with gates that swing open and shut.

But in Jesus' day, corrals for the night were low stone fences. Shepherds used them as they crossed the pastures one place to another. The gap in the fence is the thura, the opening. And there the shepherd lay down to sleep. He or she used their own body as the gate or door.

Inside the corral, the sheep sleep peacefully under the shepherd's watch. Quite literally, the lions, tigers and bears wouldn't attack. In the morning, the shepherd gives the all-clear and calls the sheep out to graze again.

Sometimes two or more shepherds arrived at the same nighttime corral. All the flocks went in together and mingled. There was no worry about sorting whose sheep were whose because the sheep would follow only their shepherd. They knew their protector's voice. And after danger had passed, they would follow their protector back out into the world wherever the shepherd led.

Jesus says he is the gate. He is the shepherd using their own body to protect us. He is the opening and portal to safety, and when danger has passed, he is the portal to abundant life and green pastures. He is the path, the way, the life.

Other people - advertisements, politicians, people who claim to be Christian but whose deeds say otherwise - others want to use the sheep for their own ends. Others want us for their own benefit instead of for our benefit. These thieves only come to the corral to steal and kill. They have no interest in the well-being of the sheep. They're only interested in serving themselves.

In my own life, I feel stolen from by global mega-businesses. I feel the ultra-rich intend to kill me, and kill every life, in order to pursue personal gain. I am not approached by Meta saying, "Hey! So we realised we shouldn't be using our mobile app to record your conversations, sell your data to marketers, and maybe give your geolocation data to the highest bidder. So we've stopped!" No. I get approached with a new theft – "you can only

use our site if you install our spyware app” – and approached for killing – “sorry you think you need food and water to live; but our AI datacentre needs the water and farm land to be profitable.”

Good shepherds, which Jesus says he is one of, provide life and bounty to the sheep. They protect the sheep from the thieves and killers. Even if it means endangering their own lives. I am in awe of the rural women of Brazil. The Marcha das Margaridas (‘Margarida’s March’ or ‘March of the Daisies’). Land in Brazil, like land in Canada, was stolen from Indigenous peoples by European settlers. Laws were enacted to be sure first Indigenous people couldn’t regain land sovereignty, and then, after slavery was outlawed, to be sure Black people couldn’t purchase land. Women, also, were targeted and considered property of men. Although they cannot own the land, Black, Indigenous, Mixed women worked the land – until this or that mining group or factory monocrop farm would take it.

Margarida Maria Alves said, “It’s better to die fighting than to die of hunger.” At the age of 22, Alves and her family were expelled from the land they lived on by large landowners and denied the right to harvest the crops they left behind.

This inspired her to take up the fight for her rights and those of her fellow rural workers. As a union leader, she filed more than 600 labor lawsuits and was an outspoken critic of labor law violations and precarious working conditions. She protected workers and fought against the thieves – some of which were and are Canadian companies. Alves’ husband asked her to stop; many told her to listen to the death threats and give up. She refused. Good shepherds protect the sheep – even when they are dismissed, harassed, arrested, injured, and killed. In 1983, Alves was shot and killed when she opened her door to a stranger. Her killers were never convicted.

Margarida means daisy. She is called the seed who died and gave rise to hundreds of thousands of more. The Daisy March is the largest movement in Brazil and labours through more death threats, kidnappings and murders for a society where buen vivir is known – an Indigenous viewpoint where harmony between humans and nature is obtained.

I am inspired by these women who march in her name and continue to care for one another, and protect nature. They are portals, the ways, of moving from danger to safety, and from safety to abundant life for all.

When I think about Jesus as the portal, the gate, or the door that keeps me safe when in times of trouble, and leads me out in times of peace - I think of... my tent flap.

As a child, my friends and I liked to camp in the backyard. When the tent flap was closed and zipped shut - we felt secure. Out there, in the dark, were mosquitos and monsters. In here, in the light, were cozy sleeping bags and giggles. When morning came, however, we wanted out that flap! Outside was bird calls and breakfast! Now outside was bright and inside dim.

I view Jesus as my tent flap. When things get scary, he gathers me into a safe space with others. When things are safe, he urges me out into the world. When I am overwhelmed with all the death and lies, thieving and pain - Jesus says come and rest. I'll keep watch.

When I am feeling spunky and on fire, or too comfortable and overstaying my respite time - Jesus calls me to come out. Time to grow. Time to thrive. Time to work. Time to explore the marvelous world about us.

I think of the many sheep of many flocks in a corral like 4-H camp. When me and my friends camped in the backyard, we all had similar interests and knew one another. You could say we were the Kilbourne Ohio flock. But at 4-H camp there were kids from all 88 Ohio counties and worse - from my own county who were bitter rivals. All of us were gathered into tents and cabins at night bumping elbows with people who didn't always look like us, think like us, smell like us, or share the same values.

We were noisy sheep. Baa-ing with excitement and consternation. Bleating with joy and bleating with anger.

Our shepherds, the camp counselors, protected us from all the dangers that might befall kids while we conquered the frustration of living with people who are different than ourselves. We grew in social skills, in empathy, and in self-awareness because the counselors kept us safe.

Kids camps are like that - you never know who is going to be in your cabin. It might be the first time a kid spends solid time with someone of another culture, another economic situation, or physical ability. Because the counselors keep them safe from the thieves and all that goes bump in the night, the kids can navigate the scary but essential need to learn about others, and about themselves.

When camp is over and the kids return to their home flocks, they take with them the experience. The growth in confidence, awareness of who they are, and ability to navigate social situations.

Camp in nature is even better, in my not-so-humble-opinion. Because now kids also develop confidence that nature is not a strange and scary and bug-filled place, but a friend full of wonder and delights and creatures of all kinds.

Camp McDougall has multiple campers who come from Toronto, and from homes with troubles. These kids camp alongside kids who come from peaceful homes and from rural areas. All the sheep mix in cabins, learn from one another, and learn about themselves. And the shepherds, the counselors, call them out at day to learn about their natural world, about faith, and building self-confidence in who they are in a diverse Canada and diverse world.

I think those early believers were able to live with all things in common - sharing their lives, their food, their homes, their possessions - because the Good Shepherd lead by example. I think our campers are learning how to be in relationship with one another, and nature, through the good example you and camp counselors set.

So let us praise God for camping in all its form, praise God for the safe spaces to learn how to navigate others different than ourselves, and praise God for the wonder of creation. Amen!

Scripture Readings – Apr. 26, 2026

Acts. 2: 42-47

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Life among the Believers

⁴³ Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

John 10: 1-10

Jesus the Good Shepherd

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

May God's spirit shape our understanding of these words.

And may they awaken in our hearts

