

2020 SUMMER DEVOTIONAL

First Presbyterian Church, Greensboro, NC
fpcgreensboro.org

Week eight



I am
the
Gate
for
the
Sheep

John 10:
1-16

I love the gospel of John. I love the stories that appear only in this gospel. I love the post-resurrection narratives where Jesus comes back with wounds on his body and shares breakfast with his beloved friends. I love the “Bread of Life discourse” that the Revised Common Lectionary dwells on for four weeks in the summer every three years. I love the way John narrates Jesus’s coming into the world (in the beginning was the Word...).

And indeed, today I am learning to love this passage from John 10, where Jesus speaks of a sheepfold and a gate and a very good shepherd. Throughout John’s gospel, we hear these rather enigmatic sayings of Jesus where he proclaims to be bread and a vine and light and here, both a shepherd and a gate for sheep. These sayings help us to image Christ, to flesh out the attributes of the God-made-human. Here, we read of an image that reminds us of a central truth: Jesus’s care for us is attentive and deep. He knows each of us as intimately as a shepherd knows her sheep, fending off danger and nurturing us with love.

As we keep reading into verse 16, we also remember that Jesus’s care for the world is even wider than we might imagine. His care for the sheep of the world extends far beyond our own flock. There are other flocks, Jesus acknowledges, and he says, “I must bring them also and they will listen to my voice.” The love of God in Christ Jesus is indeed deeper and wider than we imagined, and perhaps even deeper and wider than we would like to believe. This image of the good shepherd and the open gate prompts us to ponder how we might have created an image of Jesus in our own image. And then Jesus, as he often does, invites us to take another look at scripture and see who Jesus really is: the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.

– Rev. Alexandra Mauney



John 10:7
“So again Jesus
said to them,
‘Very truly, I
tell you, I am
the gate for the
sheep.’”

This painting, entitled “God’s Gate,” is by FPC member Joyce D’Arconte. Joyce writes: “This is God’s gate. Through this gate Jesus will lead his sheep.”

Take in the painting image, slowly moving your eyes over the it. Invite the Holy Spirit to be present with you in this exercise of visual devotion.

What do you notice when you look at the painting? What first stands out to you?

How do the colors and shapes in the painting make you feel? Does your eye gravitate towards a particular color or area of the painting?

Read today’s scripture verse. Do you experience any resonances between the scripture and the image?

Pause. Breathe. Take in the image once more. Close your devotion time with a prayer, offering to God the prayers of thanksgiving and intercession that are on your heart this day.

WEEK EIGHT

DAY TWO

Visio divina

WEEK EIGHT
DAY THREE

Spiritual practice

Engaging hymnody

We know that our faith deepens and broadens when we engage embodied practices that form us as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. We invite you this week into the practice of engaging Christian hymnody.

The central image of this week's scripture reading is the image of the sheep. Christ, in this passage, is the Good Shepherd, the one who takes care of his flock. This scriptural image may also remind us of Psalm 23: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. These passages, with their rich imagery of sheep and pastures, are well represented throughout the pages of Christian hymnals, and they invite us to engage the spiritual practice of singing, or at least of reading and listening to hymns. In the next days, you are invited to pick a few of the hymns listed below, and if you have a hymnal at home, take the hymnal out and sing through them or read through them. If you don't have a hymnal, look the hymns up on YouTube and find settings of the hymns that speak to you. Let the music be for you a meditation on the richness of this scriptural image. How wonderful it will be when we're able to sing together again!

Hymns to Explore:

- The King of Love (Henry W. Baker)
- Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us (Dorothy A. Thrupp)
- The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want (Francis Rous)
- Lead Me, Guide Me (Doris M. Akers)
- Have No Fear, Little Flock (Zimmermann & Jillson)