

# The Jesus Gate

The Rev'd Andrew Van Kirk

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St. Andrew's Westridge

There's a famous verse, a benediction of sorts, at the end of Psalm 121. It may sound familiar to your ear. It goes like this: "The LORD shall watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time forth, forever more."

Embedded in there is this circumlocution for everyday living: going out and coming in, Bible-speak for "daily life." Moses uses the same phrase right at the end of his life. Speaking to the gathered people of Israel, he said to them, "I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in" (Deut 31:2).

It reminds me of breathing, this coming in [breathe in] and going out [breathe out]. Or the daily grind of work and home — go out to work, come in to home...go out, come in. We know there's more to life than simply being not dead — the Bible speaks to this more, reminds us of it, in this wonderful little phrase.

Joshua used this figure of speech; so did Solomon and Isaiah. And Jesus spoke this way, which is why I'm bringing it before you this morning. My sermon this morning is called "The Jesus Gate," and it's centered on verse 9 of our reading from the gospel of John: "I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture" (John 10:9).

First, a word about the metaphor. Jesus says "I am [a lot of things]." "I am the life," "I am the truth," "I am the way," even "I am the Good Shepherd." But "I am the gate" doesn't usually make the greatest hits compilation of "I am" sayings. What is he talking about? Well, first, forget the image of cattle guard and pickup truck idling and someone futzing with a chain secured around a big steel gate set into a length of barbed wire fence. Jesus did not say "I am a ranch gate."

In Jesus' day, shepherds would gather the sheep into a sheepfold at night, and enclosed area (often naturally enclosed) with only one way in or out. Then the shepherd would lie down across that entrance and exit point. There would be no other "gate" — but that was ok. Because to get out the sheep would have to go over the shepherd. And sheep are known neither for stealthiness nor for their vertical leaping ability. Thieves would face a similar hurdle. The shepherd was in his very life, the personal guarantor of the security of the sheep.

He would keep them safe when they were in the sheepfold; keep them safe when they went out, and then bring them safely back in. Coming in and going out. Coming in and going out. All the time led, protected, cared for, by the shepherd who was himself the gate.

I'm just guessing here, but I believe that if I told you Jesus said, "I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved," and then I asked you what he was speaking about, you'd say "heaven." But it can't be heaven, right? Because of all the going out and coming in...because there are clearly thieves and bandits...because, to use the words of the famous Psalm, we sometimes find ourselves in "the valley of the shadow of death." And the valley of the shadow of death is not a geographical feature on the map of heaven!

Shepherding is something we need right now, in this life, as we come in and go out. We need to be shepherded to heaven; we need to be saved until our salvation is truly and fully realized. There are a lot of comings and goings between now and then, and his protection and care and love is what Jesus is promising us.

Think about your comings and goings in a given week.

For many of us, tomorrow morning brings with it the expectation that we will come in to the office. Will you be a sheep of the Lord's tomorrow, under his guidance, or will you be a sheep of whatever company's logo is printed on your ID badge? What if those two shepherds want different things?

Next time you go out on the town, will the decisions you make at the bar or when you get behind the wheel, will they be the same decisions the you that's sitting here right now would want yourself to make? That the Lord would want you to make?

What will happen the town you go out on is out of town — and there's no risk that anyone you know will know what happens? Do you really think you can go out of town and come in to DFW again and what happened in Vegas will stay there?

Surely you know that sooner or later the skills with which you have been gifted and which you've honed for years are going to come in handy for the service of Christ's kingdom? And that you may even have to go out of your way to use them. There are examples of this all around us — the banners, partitions, altar vestments, the music, the setup, and the teardown. We're here because sheep in the fold of Christ have gone out of their way when their skills and gifts came in handy. And you might be next.

When the clothes you're wearing now, or the clothes you bought for the adolescent human who lives at your house and begged and begged because "all of my friends" have them, when these clothes go out of style next season and something else

comes into style, Jesus will still be there. And that Jesus will love you exactly the same no matter how your dressed — which sounds trivial until we remember that's not at all true about the world at large.

When the boy you've always liked finally asks shyly "Will you go out with me?" will you intertwine your fingers in his and go out together through the gate of the Lord, making him a part of each new step of your relationship?

And when the answer to "Will you go out with me?" is "No" (or some variation thereof), will you come in, bearing your broken heart in your hands and let the Good Shepherd care for you?

When anger or frustration or stress takes a hold of you, and you come in hot on a friend or family member or coworker or waitress, scalding them with your fury, will you be a sheep of the Good Shepherd then? Will you admit your wrong and ask for forgiveness?

Are you being called to go out on a limb? Take a risk — in your career, to follow your passions, or even to take a risk for the sake of the Lord. To go out on a limb and invite someone to church? Broach the unspeakable with the one who shall not be named, whomever that is in your life? To go out on a limb and stand up for a immigrant, even if you suspect they may not have come here legally. To go out on a limb and tell one of your priests about the passion God has laid on your heart so we can figure out how to bring it to fruit together?

And do you want to end this life going out with a bang or going out with a whimper? I go back and forth on this one; there is something about spending one's final days measuring afternoons in coffee spoons, too old to work and too stubborn to stay in bed. That doesn't sound so bad.

But however we go out at the end, until then, we need to be able to come in peace and go in peace. Not peace in the sense that nothing bad can happen, but peace that ultimately, come what may, the shepherd will be there for us.

There's this great opening line from the poet Gerard Manly Hopkins, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God." He is speaking about the natural world, but I think the image, of being charged with the grandeur of God, is a most apt description of our life as the sheep belonging to the Lord our shepherd and gate. All our comings, and all our goings, they are to be shot through with the glory of God.

There's a famous ritual practiced by the football team at the University of Notre Dame. As they leave the locker room and go out onto the field, they pass a sign hung on the wall, on which is written "Play Like a Champion Today." Each player, as they pass it, touches the sign. It's is their gate through which they go out on to the field. Sure, it's a pagan talisman, but the idea is that those words infuse everything

they do out on the field. “Play Like a Champion” is the principle that shapes their going out. When they come in to the locker room after the game, each player touches it again. Going out and coming in.

Jesus wants to be like that for your life and mine. And concretely, it’s not be a bad idea to place a cross by your door and touch it as you come and go each day. But the difference is that Jesus is no pagan talisman, he’s no dead piece of sheet metal — he’s living God and man. So it’s not the idea nor the ideal of Jesus that we carry with us as we go out and come in, but the living Son of God himself.

He wants to be a part of all our going outs and all our coming ins. That is what it means to be his sheep. As if we do so we will be saved (and be safe) and will find pasture. You will find pasture, which means that you will find substantive and healthy and sustaining things to learn, and do, and be a part of.

“I came that they may have life and might have it abundantly.” That’s the last thing Jesus says in this passage. This can be true for you in this life. Be his sheep. Which means he must become the gate of your life — all of it, all your going outs and coming ins. Whether you’re going out of your way, coming into the office, going out on a limb, coming in peace, going out to eat, or coming though in the clutch, may your going and coming be with Jesus Christ, the risen Lord and Good Shepherd of the sheep. Amen.