

Don't Climb the Fence, Use the Gate

Intro. Most villages had a common sheep pen that several flocks could be herded into at night to keep them safe. Someone, not usually a shepherd, was hired to watch the sheep overnight. In a small village, the pen might be just a low wall and the gatekeeper could sleep across the opening, becoming the gate himself. In the morning, each shepherd would come to the gate, be recognized as the true shepherd, call his flock out of the pen and lead them to the pasture.

I. This is the image the Lord chose to explain what kind of leader he was. The passage comes immediately after the cure of the man born blind and his interrogation by the Pharisees and when they realized the Lord said *they* were blind to the reality of the Messiah's presence right in front of them. The

man born blind saw him clearly. Not stopping there, the Lord also told the Pharisees they were thieves and robbers who did not take care of the flock, God's people. Because they did not know the sheep and the sheep did not recognize their voice the sheep would not follow them. They were also bad gatekeepers who did not protect the sheep. The gospel is paired today with the well-known twenty-third psalm. There are the peaceful images of green pastures and restful waters. It also raises the image of the dark valleys through which we periodically pass. But in those dark valleys the Lord, the Good Shepherd, is there with his rod to drive away the wolves and his staff to guide us, which gives courage. In the green pastures it is sometimes difficult enough to recognize the Lord's voice amid the many other voices around us. In the dark valley,

it is *even harder* to hear the Lord's voice clearly. That is why having a relationship with the Lord is good. A familiar voice can sometimes reach us in the same way we can recognize family and friends voices in a crowd and find them.

Concl. Sheep have a tendency to wander off; one strays and the whole flock follows. The shepherd has to go find them and lead them back to a safe place. We are not sheep. We are given free will. We can make our own choices in life. We can go our own way if we choose and can ignore the Lord's call. But we can be shepherds. By our faith in the Lord, we can lead others to recognize his voice and help us all find the green pastures and the restful waters we need especially now. There are many examples of people shepherding us through this pandemic. Some never expected to lead families and

communities by making meals and signs of appreciation for those who work so hard to heal us literally and figuratively. Be a **shepherd** leading others to the Lord. Or be **the gate** through which people enter into green pastures and restful waters.

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