

At the Gate

1 Peter 2:19-25

John 10: 1-10

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1 Peter 2: 19-25

For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

John 1: 1-10

"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. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

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Last September at the clergy convocation in Maine we participated in an activity to write a brief autobiography. Our writing prompt was based on a poem by George Ella Lyonⁱ, entitled *Where I'm From*, that describes where, who, how, she is from. *Where I'm From* grew out of her response to a poem from *Stories I Ain't Told Nobody Yet*ⁱⁱ which by nouns and verbs and adjectives uniquely and deeply describes the roots, the ties, the stories, that link us to a particular path and people. It is about what has shaped her, what has written her story.

She begins with these words:

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the back porch.
(Black, glistening,
it tasted like beets.)
I am from the forsythia bush
the Dutch elm
whose long-gone limbs I remember
as if they were my own

I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know-it-alls
and the pass-it-ons,
from Perk up! and Pipe down!
I'm from He restoreth my soul
with a cottonball lamb
and ten verses I can say myself.

As I thought about this poem and the ways not only George Ella Lyon told her story, and the way a roomful of pastors were invited to tell our own stories, but also this Gospel verse as Jesus is a metaphorical abundance of roles offering us many gifts-- leading, guiding, protecting, redeeming and loving. Jesus the Good Shepherd is from many places, rooted in many places. There are many roots, ties, and stories that link Jesus to a particular path and to us, many ways his story was shaped and written.

I'm from the beginning with God, the Word with God,
formless void, wind blowing and water swirling.

I'm from the line of David, a shoot from the stump of Jesse, tending flocks,
Singing psalms to God, Selah,
anointed by God to lead and serve.

I'm from 'the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light,'
from 'For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,
from 'Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son,
and shall name him Immanuel.'

I'm from God, from a carpenter and the one whose soul magnifies the Lord,
from manger and magi, from star and angel's song,
from nearby shepherds,
from gold, frankincense and myrrh.

I'm from Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Capernaum,
from the River Jordan, the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane,
from prayer and miracles,
healing and hospitality, teaching and forgiving.

I'm from calling fishermen and tax collectors, from eating with sinners,
from demon casting and table flipping,
from washing dirty, dusty feet
and from loved abundantly with costly nard.

I'm from 'the spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me,'
from 'come to me all you who are heavy burdened and I will give you rest,'
from 'I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings,'

I'm from love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your mind, from turn the other cheek,
from love your neighbor as yourself, from beatitudes and parables,
from feeding thousands and loving infinitely, thy kingdom come.

I'm from guarding sheep and souls, meeting needs,
tending my flock, feeding my sheep,
so they have no want, restoring distressed, stray and burdened souls.

I'm from green pastures that give peaceful rest,
that restore beloved souls from their darkest depths,
living water that offers pure, thirst quenching.

I'm from carrying and cradling my beloved lambs through the gloomiest dell,
the darkest nights of their souls,
tenderly guiding, protecting, comforting.

I'm from leading back the wandering stray from the edge of the cliff,
from chasing away the wolves of evil and danger, finding the lost,
rod and staff, crook and flock

I'm from a remembrance table of grain and wine that welcomes all, forgives all;
a banquet served for the loved and the enemies.

I'm from a being a blessing and giving a blessing,
lavishly pouring caring tenderness,
healing the cares of my beloved sheep.

I'm from the shadow of goodness and mercy, opening wide the doors of home day after day,
never holding back.

I'm from the boundary of in and out, the gate itself of safety and protection in,
danger and threats out, the good shepherd of trust and shelter.

I'm from the sheepfold entry,
my sacred, wounded body as the gate itself,
welcoming friends, holding back intruders,
gate and grace, watching for thieves and robbers of abundant life
when they attempt to climb over the walls.

I'm from the voice heard, known and recognized, the voice my flock follows,
the voice that guides with lessons and encouragement,
the voice that speaks forgiveness and renewal,
the voice that offers the way, the truth and the life.

I'm from knowing my sheep, tenderly calling each name, knowing each story.
Come to me. Follow me. I know them, they know me, none left behind
abandoned, or forgotten.

I'm from the flowing, living waters of abundant life, poured out in baptism,
drenched in Spirit, drenched in promises offering life on earth, offering life eternally.

I'm from radical love, tending to the grateful and the ungrateful,
caring for the honest and the corrupt, loving the unlovable,
understanding those who do not understand,
the good shepherd of the peace makers and the peace takers

I'm from preaching the good news of God's kingdom, from redeeming the world,
from turning despair into hope, from turning injustice anywhere to justice everywhere.

I'm from the cross of wood and nails on Calvary, the good shepherd
who lays down my life for the sheep,
the ultimate act of goodness laying down my life for my friends..... Amen.

ⁱ <http://georgeellalyon.com/where.html>

ⁱⁱ Carson, Jo, *Stories I Ain't Told Nobody Yet*, Orchard Books, 1989; Theater Communications Group, 1991