



The HOLY FROG

Honour Others, Lower Yourself and Fully Rely On God. Blog

The Shepherd & the Gate!



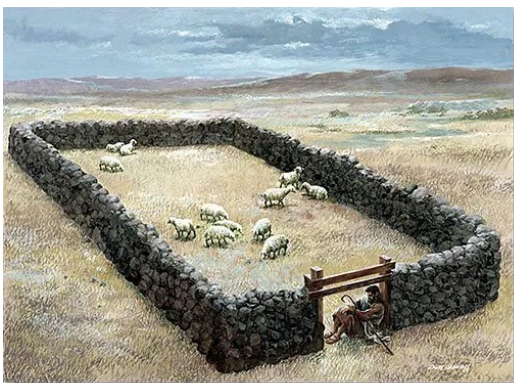
It was wonderful to see our baby daughter take her first steps. Within a few weeks she was walking without any support and following us around wherever we went. All was good until, she realised that she could decide where and when she wanted to go wandering off to! The problem was, however, she was not always aware of the danger she was in! Of course as her dad, I tried to keep an eye on her and guide her away from injury or disaster. Vulnerable ornaments were removed, cupboard locks were fitted and a stair-gate was installed at the top of the stairs to protect her from the danger of falling down them. It was a relief to put her back into her cot at night knowing she was safe and sound!

One afternoon I heard a scream, several bumps and bangs, followed by distraught crying! I ran to the stairs to see my daughter at the bottom (shocked and sobbing) and my nephew at the top, looking very sheepish, peering over the gate, which was still firmly shut. In a moment of well intended kindness, he had lifted her over the stair-gate, onto the stairs and let her go! Neither of them had considered what would happen next. She fell! She bounced! She clung to me for comfort. She felt safe.

In considering the "I AM" statements Jesus made (recorded in John's Gospel) we are reminded that he is God and also learn a little more about his character and purpose. He claimed to be the **Bread of Life** - fulfilling all our spiritual needs: the **Light of the World** - dispelling our spiritual darkness: In the following scripture he now claims to be a **Gate for the sheep** and the **Good shepherd!** A bit obscure you might think?

I am the gate for the sheep. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. [My sheep] will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 'I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me" (John 10:1-14)

All this chat about shepherds, sheep and gates might seem random to us today but in Bible times it was absolutely relevant and a common part of life. Sheep were valuable assets and as such shepherds took responsibility for the welfare of their sheep very seriously. Like my daughter, sheep often wander off on their own and are totally unaware of the dangers around them. So, after a day out on the hills, 'watching over' their sheep, continually alert to the dangers of wild animals or thieves, a shepherd would lead their flock into the safety of a fold. These enclosures were roughly constructed stone walls, having a single opening through which the sheep would go in and out. Since there was no gate, the shepherd would sit in the gap himself to keep the sheep in and wild animals out. **He was literally the gate for the sheep!**





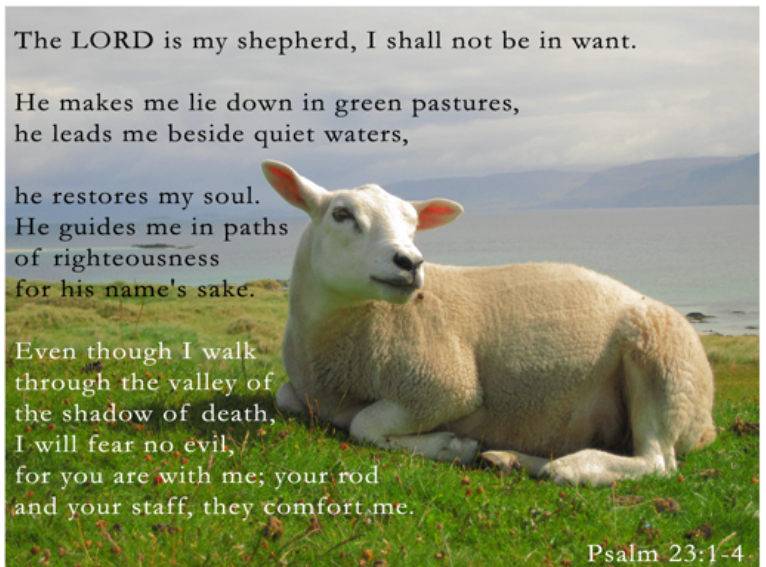
Now, in the light of this image, consider Jesus' two "I AM" statements again. Firstly, **I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.** The sheep needed a place of refuge and security. A place where they couldn't wander off, the flock couldn't run away and predators couldn't get to them easily. In the sheepfold, with the shepherd as the gate, they were safe. Throughout the Bible, God persistently offers himself to humankind as a place of spiritual refuge and security. Jesus also consistently spoke of the invitation for anyone to enter into this place - he called it the Kingdom of God. But there is only one way into that place says Jesus, through me, the gate; **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life"** (John 3:16)

It would be a foolish sheep that turned down the offer of such security. Yet, some people may turn away from being a follower of Jesus through fear of being 'stuck in a sheepfold' trapped by rules; not allowed any freedom; unable to do what you like and go where you like. Such restrictions on life may well be argued in the case of 'religion', 'belief systems' or 'moral codes' but this is not the life that Jesus offers. **'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me'** He offers a daily, real living relationship with God himself. A relationship like that between a shepherd and his sheep.

So What? Sheep were not constantly kept in the fold but lead out daily, to green pastures. However, like my daughter, unaware of surrounding dangers, they often faced difficult times. Like sheep, we need to be guided away from our own selfish instincts which lead us astray; to be protected from blindly 'following the flock' and of course we too need to be saved from those that would snatch us away from the Shepherd. As we come out of Lockdown it may seem unnerving and weird. We may feel vulnerable and anxious. So remember, if we choose to live in relationship with God, submitting ourselves to his ways even when we walk in the shadow of danger and darkness, we need not fear, because the Lord, our shepherd is with us. If we accept Jesus' claim that he is the way into God's kingdom we too can know the peace and security that he brings, even when surrounded by fear, uncertainty and even death itself.

Chaplain's Challenge:

1. **Find** pictures of five different gates What is their purpose? Is there a story about them?
2. **Investigate** the nature of how sheep work and the role of a shepherd today.
3. **Reflect** on the words of Psalm 23 and use them as a basis for your prayers this week
4. **Read** Psalm 23 and illustrate, journal or VLOG BLOG your thoughts - send them in!!
5. **Look out for** others who are feeling vulnerable, anxious and afraid and pray for them that they might know God's peace, comfort and security.



Join in our worship by sending your responses, photos, poems & stories of faith in action to

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