

02/18/18 @ BUCYRUS UMC – 1ST SUNDAY IN LENT

TITLE: I AM THE GATE

TEXT: JOHN 10:1-10

GOD'S WORD: PSALM 118:19-29

I – THE GARDEN GATE:

I believe I've shared with you before that I have always enjoyed gardening. I've had in the ground, raised beds, and mixed in with flowers gardens. I have always had a garden of some sort no matter where I've lived. As I walked around the yard this past week in the nicer weather and looked at the garlic I planted last fall peeking up from the ground I got to thinking about the garden I had at our one house on Woodale Ave. in Bucyrus. Due to the care and work it received you could go out in the spring and turn the ground over with your hands and see the fine powder ready for the seeds. I had a strawberry patch and an asparagus patch there and grew large tomatoes and zucchini, onions and potatoes, peppers and beans. Julie and I ate wonderful things from that garden.

The problem was that I had to work around a fence to grow, take care of, and harvest these ripe and delicious vegetables and fruit. You see we had a pest named Flash the Wonder dog who liked to eat the same things we did and would get to them before we did if not kept out of the garden. So I erected a four-foot wooden picket fence around the garden with a sturdy gate to keep him out. To add insult to injury there was a mother rabbit that would make her nest in the garden each year and give birth to her little ones. I thought she was teasing Flash.

All Flash knew was that inside that fence was a bounty of good things from the ripe tomatoes he chewed up to the baby rabbits he wanted to chew up, and the only thing standing in his way was a wooden gate he couldn't get through. Inside this fence was a veritable paradise to this aging Bassett hound and all he had to do was walk through that gate.

II - WE WANT IN THE GARDEN:

I don't want you to think I'm calling you a pack of dogs, but as I thought about all of this it dawned on me there is a comparison between us and Flash. In one way or another we are all trying to get in the garden where the good stuff is. We'd like to have a lot of money but we can't get through the gate to a better paying job. We'd like to be in good physical condition but we can't get through the gates of good diet and exercise. We'd like to spend more time with the spouse or the kids but we can't get through the gates of commitment and over extension. We'd like to have a lot of the luscious fruit that this life has to offer, but there are usually gates to get through before we can have it.

The trouble is we are surrounded by gardens we want to get into. We all want to have more, all looking for that garden that will bring us true and complete happiness. There is only one such garden. All the gates that have to do with money and other worldly pleasure are false gates. Their fruit is delicious, but it doesn't last forever. No matter how you preserve it or refrigerate it, it only lasts a single human lifetime at the most. As a matter of fact these other gates and gardens can distract you from the real one...the garden of God where the fruits of life are enjoyed for all of eternity.

The gate we want to enter is "THE GATE", which leads to the Holy city of God. The gate we want to walk through is the one the Psalmist called the righteous gates in this morning's reading. It's the gate we walk through because God didn't hand us over to the hands of death, but gave us life so we can walk through the gates as victors and do so with praise on our lips. Entering these gates brings us true happiness and joy, fruits that will preserve us forever and ever. And we can walk through those gates this very day. The Psalmist said Salvation now! And that walking through the gate brings us a free and full life. That's the gate I want in, don't you? The stuff on the other side of that gate has to be much better than anything I can grow.

III - TEXT:

There is only one such gate. There is only one gate to get us into this garden of paradise. Jesus tells us where that gate is found in this morning's text...

John 10:1 - 10 (THE MESSAGE)

“Let me set this before you as plainly as I can. If a person climbs over or through the fence of a sheep pen instead of going through the gate, you know he's up to no good—a sheep rustler! The shepherd walks right up to the gate. The gatekeeper opens the gate to him and the sheep recognize his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he gets them all out, he leads them and they follow because they are familiar with his voice. They won't follow a stranger's voice but will scatter because they aren't used to the sound of it.”

Jesus told this simple story, but they had no idea what he was talking about. So he tried again. “I'll be explicit, then. I am the Gate for the sheep. All those others are up to no good—sheep stealers, every one of them. But the sheep didn't listen to them. I am the Gate. Anyone who goes through me will be cared for—will freely go in and out, and find pasture. A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.

Jesus uses the image of Shepherds and sheep to get his point across, something the people at the time and in 1st century Palestine would have been very familiar with. In that day the shepherds had sheep pens built out of stones or mud bricks or in an overhanging cave and these enclosures only had one opening to take the sheep in and take them out. The shepherd guarded this opening. He would stand at it as the sheep came in from the pasture and check them over for wounds or scratches they may have gotten and put oil on the sores to care for them. Once they were inside he would lay down across the opening to protect the sheep from thieves or wild animals at the risk of his own life. Jesus says that anyone who goes in by any way except the gate is a thief or worse, someone who will hurt the sheep and lead them astray.

The point he's trying to get across to his listeners is that he is the true Shepherd, the only one who can open the gate of heaven for them. He is

the true Messiah, all the others are false messiahs and will lead them astray, cause them hurt. The gates they guard will not lead them to a garden paradise, but instead to a garden of turmoil and trouble, possibly for all of eternity.

Well, as usual they didn't get it, didn't understand what he was saying so he said "let me put this in words you all can understand. All these others who want you to follow them and be their disciples are nothing more than sheep stealers! They don't care about your welfare, only their own. They could care less whether the garden you get into is full of fruit or full of thorns. "I AM THE GATE." If you enter through this gate you will be cared for, if you enter through this gate you will have more and better life than you could ever even dream of. If you enter this gate you will find eternal life in paradise. I AM the gate that you must go through to get to heaven it's that simple.

Is that explicit enough? Do you get it?

IV – JESUS IS THE GATE:

Jesus is the gate, the opening, the doorway to the abundant life God has for us. Jesus is the gate that opens into a new life, and eternal life, and all we have to do is walk through. Unlike the garden Flash wanted to get into and raid, this gate isn't guarded by a large sweaty man with a rake. This gate is open to anyone who wants to enter in. This gate is open to all the sheep that find the Lamb of God. Jesus isn't the guard, Jesus is the gate that opens and allows us to enter into the garden of paradise and the presence of God.

All the other gates in life are false sources of happiness. Money can bring happiness for only a short time, the gate we call Jesus will bring me happiness for eternity. I should take care of my body here but no matter how many diet and exercise gates I pass through, this body will eventually fail me. Passing through the Jesus gate promises me a new body without flaws, without disease, without fat cells. Spending time with a spouse or children or friends is nice and even expected of us by our Christian beliefs, but even that pales in comparison to spending an eternal lifetime with Jesus. If you're putting all your time, energy, and Faith in these gardens, you're barking at the wrong gate.

Most of these other gates are really revolving doors, not doors into the garden. You get in them and it's like a dog chasing its tail. You get stuck in them going around and around trying to get to the fruit you think will make you happy, but all you do is look at it through the glass as you pass by repeatedly. You'll never be truly happy here. Jesus said let me be explicit. There is only one gate to happiness...ME. Pass through this gate and you will be cared for, you will find the good garden, you will have a better life than you could ever dream of and you will live it for all of eternity. Get out of the revolving door and walk through the Jesus gate instead.

V – HAVE YOU FOUND THE GATE?:

This week's piece of the answer to our Lenten question of "WHO DO YOU SAY I AM" is that Jesus is the gate we have to pass through to get into paradise, God's garden, the place we call heaven.

The question this week is simply, "HAVE YOU PASSED THROUGH THE GATE." Have you found the precious fruit of Salvation, which can only be found and enjoyed through the blood of Jesus? Or are you stuck in a revolving door at one of the other gates of false promises and fake messiahs?

If you haven't yet done so wouldn't today be a beautiful day to walk through that gate and into a relationship with Jesus? The good news is this gate will open to everyone, regardless of who they are or what they've done, and it's never too late. Contrary to popular belief you can teach an old dog new tricks. Remember the thief who hung on the cross beside Jesus at the crucifixion? While they were hanging there dying the thief recognized Jesus was the gate and he came to believe Jesus was the Son of God. The gate opened and Jesus said "TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE." I pray you all have or will walk through the gate and as you leave this life hear the voice of Jesus say..."welcome to the garden."

AMEN