



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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May 15, 2011
4th Sunday of Easter
Sermon Text: [John 10:1-10](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [1 Samuel 17:34-37](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 23](#)
Second Lesson: [1 Peter 1:17-21](#)
Gospel Lesson: [John 10:1-10](#)

Watch Out For Fence Jumpers

Destruction comes over the wall
Life comes through the Gate

In 2002, Rick Reilly of Sports Illustrated wrote an article about Dion Rich. At that time, he was a 72-year-old man. You might wonder, why in the world is a guy in Sports Illustrated writing about a guy that's 72 years old? It turns out Dion Rich, who was actually what his name says he was, he was a pretty well-to-do man, had for the past 32 straight years snuck into the Super Bowl without buying a ticket. Not only did he jump fences so to speak and make it into the Super Bowl, he jumped even more fences and made it onto the field. He helped to carry Tom Landry off the field after one Super Bowl when the Cowboys won. If you look at certain pictures, he is there on the podium after the first Super Bowl when Vince Lombardi is receiving the championship award from Pete Rozelle.

So here is a guy who is a champion of all gate crashers, fence jumpers, and the question was whether or not he'd be able to do it because they had really stepped up security in the aftermath of 9-11 and Rick Reilly was following him to see whether or not he would make it in. Well, he made it in. So for 33 straight years, he got in. He got into all kinds of other events. He had his picture taken with actresses after they won Oscars. He just seems to have a knack for doing this kind of thing. It's kind of interesting and kind of funny. Rick Reilly can really write, so it was really a fun article to read.

But our God comes to us and talks to us about gate crashers or fence jumpers that are not so fun to read about. It should kind of make us sit up and pay attention when our God says to us "the one that is jumping the fence comes only to steal and kill and destroy," especially when you realize that we are the ones inside the fence that the thief is coming to steal and kill and destroy. This kind of gate crashing or fence jumping is not amusing or humorous. That's why our Lord tells us to watch out for fence jumpers. They come only to bring destruction. What they are trying to destroy is your eternal soul, your eternal salvation. So watch out for them. And as you watch out for them, cling to the Gate because life comes only through the Gate.

It's not that unusual that we read from John 10 on Good Shepherd Sunday because it's the Good Shepherd chapter. A little later in the chapter, Jesus continues to use this

picture of a sheep pen and a shepherd, only this time he says, "I am the Good Shepherd." But notice in here he is not saying he is the shepherd. He's saying he's the Gate.

He is talking to a group of people that were gathered together because there were some people upset with him. The leaders of the Jews, the Pharisees, were upset with Jesus. He had the audacity to heal a man on the Sabbath, so they questioned the guy and asked him all about it. The guy just told them what happened. Now they are there and they are upset with Jesus. So Jesus, in addressing all the people there, his followers and these Pharisees, tries to make a spiritual point by using a picture they all knew really well. Outside of town there would be this walled-in enclosure where there was one gate. When the shepherds would go out to take the sheep out to pasture, all the sheep from that area would be in there overnight to protect them. The shepherd would go in and he would call out to his sheep and his sheep would come to him because they knew his voice. Then he would lead them out. But the sheep that weren't his that belonged to a different shepherd, those sheep wouldn't follow him because they knew that wasn't the voice that gets them food. That voice might be a threat. So they wouldn't follow that voice. This is a picture they could understand.

There would be a gate. At times there would literally be a shepherd that would lay across the gate and be the guard that night to take care of the sheep. So if someone comes and they try to hop the fence, they aren't doing it because they forgot a key to the gate, because the gate was often the person laying across the entranceway. They were doing it because they came to steal and destroy.

Notice what Jesus says. They don't get the picture he is trying to paint so he says, "Here's what it is. I'm the Gate. Everyone that has come before me are fence jumpers. They've come only to steal and destroy." Can you imagine yourself in the Pharisees' shoes right then? "All those who have come before me are just fence jumpers who have come to steal and kill and destroy." Do you think that maybe he was making eye contact with those guys at that point in time? They couldn't have been very happy about it. They now knew what he was saying.

He was saying that because they didn't believe in Jesus as the Messiah, they were going to steal, kill and destroy these people. Anyone that comes to them and doesn't come through Jesus, through the Gate, Jesus was saying they'd come to steal, kill and destroy. It's a pretty easy picture when you understand what Jesus is talking about. The Gate is important. If you are going through the Gate, you are doing what you're supposed to do. If you're not going through the Gate, you have a problem.

If you aren't going through the Gate when it comes to eternal salvation, you have a really big problem. If you listen to any other Gospel except the Gospel of Jesus Christ, any other proclamation of man that points to anything except to Jesus Christ alone as the way of our salvation, his life and his death in our place that took away our sins, you

have a problem. You've been destroyed. I don't care how pious you look and how wonderful the things are that you might do, if you aren't clinging to Jesus Christ alone as the way of salvation, hell is your outcome.

We could sit here and talk for awhile about these other people that misapply the Gospel of Jesus Christ and twist it and they don't point to Jesus alone. They are definitely out there and God is telling us to watch out for them, but I guess what I'm more interested in is thinking about how often we try to jump the fence. We wouldn't do that. We cling to Jesus Christ alone, right?

I guess what I'm thinking about is, have you ever thought to yourself as you sat through a church meeting, or have you talked to someone about what is going on in the church, whether financially or some other item, and you've ended up talking and somewhere in the back of your mind you start thinking, "You know, if those other people were just more like me things would be better at the church." Have you ever had that thought cross your mind? If we think, "if those people would just do what I do, if they had the same ideas I have, if they'd give like I give, then the church would be better off." If that thought ever creeps into our mind that we're the ones that are doing the work to establish the church of God and we forget that it's God who works through us, aren't we kind of trying to get people to look at ourselves and not at Jesus? Aren't we putting ourselves in the place of Jesus? Aren't we becoming a fence jumper that's not going through the Gate but going through what we do? I don't want other people to be more like me. I want them to be more like Jesus. I don't want to be more like you, as much as I might like you. I want to be more like Jesus. I want to be closer to him. I need to be closer to him. You need to be closer to him.

When we get a step back removed from him and we are looking at only ourselves or at someone else saying "Gee, I wish I could do what that person does," we're taking a step back away from Jesus. We might not necessarily be fence jumpers, but we sure are walking down the road where we are focused more on other things than we are on Jesus. That's a problem.

Jesus says the only way that a good under-shepherd comes to his sheep is through him, through the Gate. Through the Gate there is life. Through the Gate there is food, spiritual food for the flock. So we want our eyes focused on God and who he is and what he has done for us and his love and his mercy. His love and his mercy that forgives us even for the times when we have done exactly what he says his sheep shouldn't do.

How often don't we chase after other voices that are not the clear voice of the Good Shepherd that comes from the Word of God? How often do we chase after the voice of tradition or the way things have always been done or what we've always seen and we don't know whether or not it is in Scripture? We just assume it is. We take a step back, a step removed from the Word of God.

It's a troubling section of Scripture to me in a sense when Jesus talks about the shepherd that comes through the Gate and he speaks the message that comes only through the Gate, which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus' sheep will always follow that voice. They won't follow a stranger. That troubles me at times. Do we at times follow a voice other than our Good Shepherd?

Do you and I sometimes follow our own voice? God says, "Don't do this," "Don't do that," and we say, "You know what? That looks like fun. I'm going to do it anyhow." God is telling me I should be running in the other direction when I'm trying to follow a voice that's not the Good Shepherd, even when it's my own voice. I don't always run. Do you? That's frightening, isn't it?

The picture in Scripture of us as sheep is pretty apt. Sometimes we make sheep-like foolish mistakes. We don't stand up for that voice when others are attacking it. We hope the moment passes. We don't cling to that voice. We don't run to that voice the way we should. We cling and we hold onto other things that are maybe a step removed from that voice. That's disappointing. It's depressing because it's sin, when you do it, or when I do it.

This is what makes our God's love for us in Christ so amazing. He knows how often we are going to chase a different voice. Yet he still says to us, "I am the Gate. When you come to me, you come through me, when you focus on who I am and how I lived in your place and died in your place, I'll take away your sins. I don't care how great or small you think they are, I've taken them all away." That's what our God says to us. And if a voice comes to you with that kind of message, that's what makes us want to cling to that voice all the more, to dial in on our inner radio to that station that is always leading us to think in terms of God's Word, think of what is God-pleasing and not what is me-pleasing, but to dial in and listen to that station nonstop in the back of our mind so that we're always listening to the voice of our Shepherd. As we heard last week, that comes from spending time in the Word and having our hearts burn within us as God speaks to us through his Word.

He shows us our flaws and shows us the fix. He shows us that we've been washed clean in the blood of Jesus Christ and we are forgiven, so we can rejoice, even though we have often failed our God. We can stand tall and listen and turn our ear toward that voice knowing that he'll always come to us in love. Then we have our ears turned into recognizing a different voice, a fence jumper and avoiding it. That's what our God has called us to, and by his grace, that's what we do.