

Jesus Christ is the Door
John 10:1 – 10
Fairview Evangelical Presbyterian Church
January 24, 2016

Review: The “I Am” statements

We are looking at the seven “I Am” statements of Jesus from John’s gospel. In previous weeks we looked at Jesus declaration that he is the “Bread of Life.” We discerned that he meant that he is the spiritual source of salvation for the world, through his sacrificial death. Jesus said that he is the “Light of the World.” He is the source of all spiritual truth and understanding. He is truth and through him we comprehend truth. Today, we look at Jesus’ declaration to be “The Door.”

When I was a child there was a television show on Saturday mornings out of New York City called “Wonderama.” It lasted three hours and was hosted by Sandy Fox. Every week there was a contest. In the center was a large locked trunk. Spread out on the floor around it were hundreds of keys. The challenge was to find the right key before the show ended. There was no skill involved. It was simply trial and error in a race against time. If you did succeed in opening the chest the winner would receive hundreds of dollars’ worth of toys. In my childishness I remember thinking that if I could win that prize then I would possess all that my heart could ever dream of wanting.

I think that this is a theme of modern life: people racing against time to find the one key that will unlock and reveal the mystery and majesty and meaning of their lives. Bruce Springsteen sings in his song Promised Land:

"I believe, I believe in a promised land,
If we could take one moment into our hands.

In today’s world, in light of the erosion of the authority of the church, the rise of relativism, and the celebration of diversity, one option seems as good as another. All the keys look alike. Modern folk try a succession of spiritual options in hopes that one will unlock the door and deliver spiritual satisfaction. What are people looking for in all these things? They are looking for a key to life: a key that will unlock the door of social and spiritual fulfillment; that will open up to them a world of satisfaction and meaning. This is why Jesus’ words are so important. Jesus said, “I am the Door.” This world may not know it but what it is looking for, the missing piece that it searches to find, is Christ himself.

Let us look at this passage and see what Jesus means in saying that he is “The Door.” The first meaning of Jesus words is a historic meaning. Jesus is the door historically. He is the promised and prophesied Messiah.

Jesus is the true Door historically – he is the true Messiah (anointed one)

But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

It is perhaps my favorite Bruce Springsteen song, Rosalita. Our daughter Rebekah named her first car, the blue Nissan Sentra, Rosalita, in honor of the song. He is singing to Rosalita, entreating her to accept his offer of love, over the disapproval of her parents. He sings,

Windows are for cheaters, chimneys for the poor

Closets are for hangers, winners use the door

There is truth in that: winners use the door. I doubt Springsteen had Jesus in mind when he wrote those words, but they echo Jesus' words, he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. Stealth and secrecy is not the way of God.

Jesus prefaces his declaration with these words: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. Jesus is contrasting himself to spiritual false messiahs. In every age there are those who claim to provide salvation, but do not. The two great false Messiahs of our day are both offshoots of the religion of Islam: Boko Haram and the Islamic State of Syria, ISIS. Both ISIS and Boko Haram claim to offer salvation in the name of Allah, but what they bring is violence, death, terror, kidnapping, rape, slavery, cruelty and humiliation. Theirs is not the way of God. But they claim to be. They believe they are doing God's will.

Jesus declares that they are thieves and robbers. They do not enter the sheepfold by the door. They seek to take it by force. Consider the contrast between Jesus, founder of the Christian faith, and Muhammed, the founder of Islam. At approximately age thirty, Jesus began his teaching ministry. He continued for three years. At the end of that time in Jerusalem, he was betrayed, arrested, humiliated, beaten, condemned to die on a cross as a common criminal. The religion of Islam traces its beginning to the hijera: when in 622 A.D. Muhammed fled persecution in the town of Mecca to the safety of the town of Medina. In Medina, Muhammed's preaching and teaching took root. His new religion flourished. A few years later Muhammed returned to Mecca at the head of a conquering army. Unlike Jesus Christ, Muhammed was not put to death by his enemies. He put his enemies to death. Muhammed achieved temporal power in his lifetime. And therein lies the vast difference between Islam and Christianity.

Jesus is unlike Muhammed, and every other religious founder, in that he came into our world as a servant. He did not seek or come for his own benefit. He came for the blessing and benefit of others. He enters by the door of his suffering and sacrifice, proving that he is the true shepherd of his sheep.

Next, Jesus is the door: God prepared his way.

Jesus is the Door: God prepared his way

³To him the gatekeeper opens.

Jesus declares that the gatekeeper opens the gate, the door for him. The gatekeeper is a reference to God the Father. Of all the religions in our world, how can we have confidence that our faith, the Christian faith, is the one that is true, right and established by God? How can we be sure that Jesus is the one sent by God, the Messiah? We know because God, the gatekeeper, has prepared the way. The promise of the Messiah was well established in Israel's history. The earliest prophesy concerning the Messiah can be traced back to Genesis 3, the beginning of the biblical story. The prophesies detail the life, ministry, death and resurrection of the Messiah. Luke 24 tells the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, of how they meet and converse with Jesus after the resurrection. What was the subject of their conversation? Luke tells us, (verse 27) And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Jesus fulfills the prophesies. God prepared the way in order to establish that Jesus is the Door.

Next, Jesus is the door to the work of his church.

Jesus is the Door to the work of his Church

The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

There are lots of religions in our world. Most religions have some good in them. Any ship that floats has got to have some good wood in it. Within the great swath of the Christian tradition, there are a great variety of Christian churches, denominations, communions, orders, fellowships, organizations and so on. As we consider all the variety of institutions associated with the Christian tradition, how do we determine which ones truly are Christian? What is the defining line that divides the institutional sheep from the goats?

I would argue that the key dividing line is this: "What do you believe and teach regarding the person of Jesus Christ?" From the beginning the church has affirmed that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, God in human flesh. He is the second person of the Trinity. He is God and man in one. Spiritual organizations that affirm these truths are within the circle of the Christian community. Those that deny Christ's divine nature are outside.

I am not intending to be mean. I am simply seeking to make clear distinctions. Let me take an example from history. Thomas Jefferson was a great man, one of the founding fathers of this nation. And, he was a very thoughtful, religious man. He was born and raised in the Christian tradition. But, as an adult, was he Christian? The clear answer to that question is "No." Jefferson knew and read his Bible. Jefferson did not believe the biblical affirmations regarding Jesus Christ's divine nature. He believed Jesus to be a great teacher, but not God incarnate. Jefferson was a theist. He believed in God. But he was not Christian for he did not believe Jesus to be God.

You are probably aware of the kerfuffle happening at Wheaton College. A professor at Wheaton publicly declared that Christians and Muslims "*worship the same God.*" That declaration is contrary to Wheaton's statement of faith and the professor has been suspended and will likely lose her job if she is unwilling to retract it. This is one of the sad consequences of the modern commitments to pluralism. We do not want to think clearly and make distinctions. Muslims and Christians are different faiths. They have different understandings of God. Ask a Muslim "Does God have a Son?" He will reply "No." Muslims know Christ as a prophet, but not as divine. Many Muslims publicly teach that Muslims and Christians do not worship the same God. For example, there are provinces in Indonesia where the government has prohibited Christians from referring to God by the name "Allah." According to these Muslims, the God of the Christians is not Allah. Christ is not "The Door" for Muslims. It is spiritually dishonest to suggest otherwise.

Next, Jesus is the one true door.

Jesus is the one true Door

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.

⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

As we saw in previous “I Am” statements, there is a strong element of exclusivity in Jesus’ declaration. Jesus is *the* door. Of course, there are many other competing doors in the world. There are innumerable religions and spiritual options available. Jesus points out that there are those who seek to harm his sheep. Are you aware that there are t-shirts for sale on college campuses today that read “So many Christians; so few lions.” The modern world believes in pluralism, diversity, and relativism. It finds the exclusivity of Christ’s claim spiritually offensive. It teaches that there are many ways to get to God. It believes that all religions are doing basically the same thing. They are headed in the same direction, pursuing the same ultimate goal.

SO MANY CHRISTIANS
SO FEW LIONS

Jesus does not agree. He did not say “I am a door.” He said “I am **the** door.” He is the doorway to God the Father. He is the one and only doorway to God.

Permit me to add on pastoral note before we move on to the next point. As you know, there is a lot of competition in our world for our spiritual affections. There are lots of religious options available. Jesus warns us that some spiritual leadership is destructive to his people, his sheep. There are spiritually destructive forces in our world. We must be on our guard against them. The key element that protects Christ’s followers is that they know the voice of the shepherd. Remember the old RCA Victor advertisement with the dog, Nipper, listening to a long playing record album? The dog listens because he hears his master’s voice. As Christians we gather in worship and in small group studies in order to deepen our knowledge of Christ. The more we know of Christ, the more faithfully we follow his word, the more we are protected from those who would seek our spiritual harm.



Next, Jesus is the door pastorally, he protects those who are his.

Jesus is the Door pastorally: he protects those who are his

⁷So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

This is the second time Jesus refers to himself as “The Door” and he means something different in this usage. In verse 2 the reference was historical. Jesus is the door, the true promised Messiah. He is the one who fulfills what has been promised. But in verse 7 the image is different. Jesus is referring to a corral, an enclosed area where the sheep and other household animals would be penned up for the night. The enclosure would be walled or fenced and it would have a single opening, not very wide, where the animals would enter in the evening and leave in the morning. After the animals were safely within the corral, the shepherd would literally lay down across the entryway. No one could go in or out without going through the shepherd. He would keep the sheep within and the predators without. It is the presence of the shepherd that makes all the difference. Because he is present at the door, all else is changed.

There are a couple of pastoral implications to Jesus as the door. First, Jesus is the door to salvation.

Jesus is the door to salvation

⁹I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

A door is an entry point. It is a way inside. Jesus declares that he is the doorway to salvation. He is the transition point. He is the source of salvation. Him alone. If you want to find salvation, you must go through Christ.

Consider the human predicament. We know intuitively that something is wrong. Every person has a sense of sin and of their separation from God. We all know that we are not the men or women that we ought to be. We know that something is not right with the world and with each of us in particular. And, in the end, we all face the reality of death: spiritual and physical. Is there any meaning to be found in life? Is there more?

Benjamin and I saw Tom Stoppard's new play, *The Hard Problem*, this past week. Most of the characters in the story are thorough-going materialists. They do not believe in God, or purpose, or meaning. Everything can be reduced, explained by biology, chemistry and physics. However, the lead character, Hillary, senses that there must be more, that there must be a reality behind things such as love, self-sacrifice, and altruism. Hillary prays. She does not have much religious faith, there is not much content to her prayer. She prays because she senses that there must be a God, a being greater than the material facts of the world. In her prayers Hillary is looking for a doorway to the wider spiritual world. What Hillary does not realize is that Jesus seeks to answer her prayers. He says to Hillary, and us, If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. Coming to Christ the Door is not an end in and of itself. Those who come to Christ the Door walk through him to go out and find pasture. Coming to Christ saves us from our sin and frees us from the power of death. And, turning to Christ leads us to a new world of living. We go through Christ the Door into the new life he gives to us.

This leads us to our last point this morning: it is the second of Jesus' pastoral applications as The Door. Jesus is the door to satisfied living.

Jesus is the door to satisfied living

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

The town of St. Louis is mid-America. The city is defined by its iconic arch. The arch symbolizes how, in the settling of this nation, St. Louis was the "Gateway to the West." Jesus did not come to earth *just* to rescue people from hell and damnation. He does that, to be sure. But Jesus Christ offers more, much more. He declares I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. Faith in Jesus Christ is entry point to abundant life, satisfied living.

In his book *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis suggests that after death those in Hell look back upon their time on earth as simply the beginning of Hell. Likewise, those in Heaven look back on their time on earth as the beginning of Heaven. I think Lewis is on point in that suggestion. St. Augustine taught that in life we are either moving upward toward Heaven or downward toward Hell. Those who pass through Christ the door are on the upward trajectory. Paul writes of this in Philippians 3:12 – 14.

¹²Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The Christian walk is following the upward call of Jesus Christ. Abundant living is moving onward and upward spiritually. We may face hard times. Hard knocks. But moving up and in is key.

When Jesus Christ enters a person's life, he brings change. When a Christian church is planted in a community, it brings change. As the gospel spreads throughout a community, society or nation, it brings change. Jesus is the giver of abundant life. For example, when research people do surveys, they find that religious folk have happier more satisfied marriages; they tend to have stronger families; and find greater satisfaction in work. Offering praise to God in worship, listening to sermons, studying the bible in small groups (or individually): these things have a positive impact upon Christian believers. It gives Christians a sense of purpose and meaning. Jesus Christ is the doorway to purposeful and fulfilled living. He gives new life, unlike the old.

I am not saying that the abundant life Christ gives is easy or simple. It is often challenging and costly. It is often sacrificial. But he gives a life that is full and rich. Knowing Christ gives us a sense of our calling and our place in this world. Knowing Christ gives us the conviction that we are part of God's purpose for this world.

Jesus came to give the good life to those who belong to him. This morning, on your way into this building, you walked through the door to enter the building. Many churches paint their doors red. At Fairview our front door is natural wood, but our side door, and the doors to the fellowship hall, are red. Why? The red doors on a church symbolize the blood of Christ. To enter the church, you must be washed in the blood of Christ. To enter Christ's kingdom, you must turn to him in believing faith. We must call upon Christ as Lord and Savior. You walked through the door of the church this morning to gather for worship. Spiritually, has your heart passed through the door that is Christ? Turn to him in faith, walk through the Door, and be saved.

John 10:1 – 10

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ²But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.