

Reflections for the 4th Sunday of Easter

The shepherd and the gate

We may feel that we are very familiar with the image of Jesus as the 'good shepherd', but this Sunday's gospel reading (from John chapter 10, verses 1 – 10) raises some aspects of it that we may be less familiar with.

For example, Jesus spoke of being the 'door' or 'gate' of the sheep (in verse 7). In those days, a sheep pen was usually a simple round enclosure with a gap in it. During the day, the sheep were often let out to wander freely and find pasture, then at night they would be gathered safely inside the pen. And sometimes, in times of danger, the shepherd would sleep across the gap, and literally *be* the 'gate', keeping the flock safe inside, and be prepared to put himself at risk and even lay down his life, and in order to protect them from danger.

The sheep were sometimes left to wander and explore, and find their own pasture. Sometimes the shepherd called and led them, to guide them to the best pasture. And sometimes they were gathered and enclosed in their pen, for their safety and protection, with the shepherd as their 'gate', their way in, and their defender – but in due course they would be let out again.

Thinking of our present situation, we could say that there were times when the sheep were kept in 'lockdown' for their own safety, with the promise that the time would come when they would again be set free to roam.

And we can remember and take to heart the promise at the end of our gospel reading, for Jesus said that he has come so that those who follow him may have *life*, and have it to the full (verse 10).

Revd John Waller

Merciful Father,
you gave your Son Jesus Christ to be the good shepherd,
and in his love for us to lay down his life and rise again:
keep us always under his protection,
and give us grace to follow in his steps;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.