

4th Sunday of Easter: Good Shepherd Sunday

*I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd
lays down his life for the sheep.*



¹¹ I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. ¹³ This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father.” (John 10:11-18)

Context

No matter which Lectionary Year, the 4th Sunday of Easter always takes the gospel reading from some part of John 10 and thus is sometimes referred to as “Good Shepherd Sunday.” There are several layers of context in this part of John’s gospel: the sequence of Jewish festivals, the content of the chapters before and after, and more.

John chapters 5 thru 10 take place during principal feasts of the Jews, including the Sabbath, Passover, Tabernacles (Chapters 7 and 8) and Dedication. Our gospel takes place in what might be called the aftermath of the Feast of Tabernacles (also called the Feast of Booths). The feast was one of the three pilgrimage festivals when faithful Jews were expected to celebrate at the Temple in Jerusalem. That expectation is evident in the gospel: “*But the Jewish feast of Tabernacles was near. So his brothers said to him, “Leave here [Galilee] and go to Judea, so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. No one works in secret if he wants to be known publicly. If you do these things, manifest yourself to the world.”*” (John 7:2-4)

Throughout John 7 the people and the Jewish authorities are witnesses to Jesus’ public teaching in the Temple precincts. They are not quite sure what to make of him. They wonder how he has such profound knowledge and understanding of Scripture and yet has not formally studied. The authorities are considering arresting him. People are wondering if he is the Messiah.

⁴⁰ Some in the crowd who heard these words said, “This is truly the Prophet.” ⁴¹ Others said, “This is the Messiah.” But others said, “The Messiah will not come from Galilee, will he? ⁴² Does not scripture say that the Messiah will be of David’s family and come from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?” ⁴³ So a division occurred in the crowd because of him. ⁴⁴ Some of them even wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. ⁴⁵ So the guards went to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, “Why did you not bring him?” ⁴⁶ The guards answered, “Never before has anyone spoken like this one.” ⁴⁷ So the Pharisees answered them, “Have you also been deceived? ⁴⁸ Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹ But this crowd, which does not know the law, is accursed.” ⁵⁰ Nicodemus, one of their members who had come to him earlier, said to them, ⁵¹ “Does our law condemn a person before it first hears him and finds out what he is doing?” ⁵² They answered and said to him, “You are not from Galilee also, are you? Look and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.” (John 7:40-52)

John 8 presents the well-known story of the “Woman Caught in Adultery,” which introduced the idea of sin and sets off a chapter of debates with the scribes and Pharisees during which Jesus invokes the divine “I AM” expression to proclaim his true nature - which as you might imagine does not go well with the scribes and Pharisees: “So they picked up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid and went out of the temple area” (John 8:59)

Because of the signs and miracles Jesus has performed, the power of his wisdom and understanding revealed in his teaching, we might wonder why some people are unable to see that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah - which is perhaps exactly the point of John 9, the story of the man born blind. The one thought to be cursed by God because of someone’s sin (his or his parents) is the one who truly sees and comes to believe. The others remain in their blindness. And we almost abruptly come to our gospel reading: the Good Shepherd.

This is the last public address of Jesus that John records. It is as if it is a final public declaration of his identity and mission. After this the focus is on the preparation of the disciples for the events of Holy Week and their mission to the ends of the world.

Some Background

To appreciate this parable it is important to understand its setting in a small first century Palestinian village. It would be quite the norm for a family to own but a few sheep. The sheep were sources of income (wool) and clothing, and so the animals were protected usually within small walled courtyards next to or connected to the house. If each family had only a few sheep, a shepherd for each household was not justified, so several households would have one shepherd to look after their sheep. Often the shepherding was done by a child from one of these families. If no child was available a hireling was employed. Early each morning the sheep would be taken out to graze in the open country. The shepherd moved from house to house, and because he was known to the doorkeepers they opened their courtyard doors to allow him to call out the sheep. The sheep knew his voice and eagerly followed him into the open country to feed. The walls of the courtyards would be substantially high, this anyone who was not the shepherd, who had ulterior motives, would have to climb over the walls because the doorkeeper would not admit him and, of course, the sheep would not recognize his call and would flee from him. While this practice was not uniform, it was typical according to scripture scholars. Interestingly, a similar system of community “shepherding” was used by the Maasai, Samburu and Kuria people of Kenya in their cattle herding.

Some thoughts about shepherds. Fr. James Martin, SJ, in his book *Jesus: A Pilgrimage* notes that most of Jesus’ parables are agricultural in nature, with some nod toward those who harvest the seas for their living; very few are rooted in his own livelihood, carpentry (or more specifically, *tecton*, a general term for one who works in the building/craft trades). Yet Jesus grew up in Nazareth amongst his

neighbors who labored in those areas. Thus, Jesus, while himself not a farmer or fisherman, would be familiar through his extended relationships. We are left to speculate the “common knowledge” about shepherds and the care of sheep and what ideas Jesus might have held.

Clearly all we can do is speculate based upon the parables and stories Jesus told that were recorded in Scripture – but as John 20 notes, not all was written down, but enough that you may believe.

A critical element of our modern reading of this text is what ideas/notions do we hold about sheep, shepherds, and the like. In my time I have heard homilies that ascribe absolute loyalty as a trait between sheep and shepherd. I have heard remarks that sheep are perhaps the dumbest animals alive and that shepherds were lazy, untrustworthy scoundrels. You can read all manner of remarks about shepherding and sheep in internet posts and blogs. For the majority of readers, safe to say do not have any real experience of their own. So, what are we to make of all this?

The Good Shepherd

Jesus uses the figure of the Good Shepherd to differentiate his ministry from that of false shepherds of the scribes, Pharisee, and in fact, all the kings and leaders of Israel. Jesus will also stress the voluntary nature of the shepherd’s sacrifice for his people. This chapter should be read in the light of Old Testament passages that castigate shepherds who have failed in their duty (see Jer. 23:1–4; 25:32–38; Zech. 11; and especially [Ezekiel 34](#), the Parable of the Shepherds (which I encourage you to read). Equally as condemning is this passage from the Prophet Isaiah: “*All the sentinels of Israel are blind, they are without knowledge...Shepherds who have no understanding; all have turned their own way.*” (Is 56:10-11) In this passage the leaders are both “shepherds” and “watchmen” and are castigated as “blind” and as those who “lack knowledge” (cf. John 9:40–41; 10:6).

God is and always has been the Shepherd of Israel (Ps. 80:1; cf. Ps. 23:1; Isa. 40:10–11), which serves as a model of the divine expectations for the responsibility of those to whom he gave the role of shepherding his people. Those entrusted with this duty must be faithful, and it is a heinous crime when they are not. But Israel’s shepherds on more than one occasion failed in their responsibility. The Books of Kings and Chronicles is almost a catalog of their failures. It is this which calls forth the prophecy that a shepherd after God’s own heart will in due course appear: “*I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd*” (Ezek. 34:23). It is this shepherd announced in John 10.

In our modern age we mostly think of the shepherd in the romantic terms of tender care and concern for the flock. An idea shared by the ancient world, but we should not overlook that for people in biblical times there were other associations. The shepherd “ruled” over his flock, and passages are not lacking where the shepherd imagery is used to emphasize the thought of sovereignty. Jesus is thus set forth in this allegory as the true Ruler of his people in contrast to all false shepherds.

The section of the John’s Gospel known as the Good Shepherd discourse runs from John 10:1-30. The passage seems to begin with a harsh, accusatory tone. As noted earlier, Jesus has been in “dialogue” with scribes, Pharisees, and other Jewish leaders for several chapters. The “boundaries” of this gospel pericope likely begins as early as John 9:39.

Chapter 9 is essentially the narrative of the “man born blind” whom Jesus heals on the Sabbath – much to the exasperation of the religious authorities who cannot see the glory of God revealed in this sign. Instead the authorities are more concerned with the “who, what, when and where” of the miracle and why it was done on the Sabbath. One of their agenda was to discredit the notion that Jesus was the promised Messiah (cf. 9:22). At the end of the narrative, the now-sighted man has been thrown out of the Temple and Jesus comes to him. While the man comes to believe in Jesus as Messiah, the religious authorities are, at best, divided – and in fact are plotting to do away with Jesus.

³⁹ Then Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind.” ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not also blind, are we?” ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, ‘We see,’ so your sin remains. (John 9:39-41)

Jesus is still speaking to the Pharisees as we enter John 10. It is not an unwarranted assumption that it is this same group who were just accused of blindness and remaining in sin and are now hearing the words about the true meaning of being a good shepherd to the people of God. The accusation hangs in the air and colors the verse that follows: *Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber.*

The Good Shepherd. Jesus uses the figure of the Good Shepherd to differentiate his ministry from that of the current religious leadership. Use of the word “good” opens up some interesting considerations. In Greek there is a generic word for “good” - *agathos*. John often uses a different word: *kalos*, which has a slightly stronger emphasis on what is morally right, what is more valuable. It can be translated as, “model,” or “true,” or “honest.” This word occurs seven times in John: five times alone in chapter 10.

- “good” shepherd (10:11, 14) in contrast to the hired hand
- “good” works (10:32, 33), perhaps in contrast to the spoken word
- and twice in 2:10 – “good” wine, in contrast to the ordinary wine

If God is the true Shepherd of Israel (Ps. 80:1; cf. Ps. 23:1; Isa. 40:10–11), we can understand the measure of the responsibility of those who would care for the flock in his stead and have failed to live up to the model (*kalos*) shepherd. Those entrusted with care of the people of God/flock must be faithful to the covenant. But Israel’s shepherds on more than one occasion failed in their responsibility. This is why God promises to give them a true, faithful, and loyal shepherd: “*I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd*” (Ezek. 34:23).

Jesus is rebuking the religious authorities as bad shepherds. The condemnation of the shepherds would have been a theme well understood from the OT narrative, especially Ezekiel 34. In that passage, Ezekiel, speaking God’s word, rebukes and condemns the authorities of his own time. They too had fed themselves rather than their flock. Thus God would take away their position and authority and become the shepherd himself. Finally he would appoint another shepherd after the figure of David. John sees all of this coming true and fulfilled in Jesus, God becoming shepherd. Thus John makes clear that the glory of God is being revealed in the pastoral metaphor of shepherd in that Jesus’ fidelity to his sheep, his sacrifice for them, will stand in contrast to the failure of the blinded, bullying authorities of John 9.

The metaphors come fast and often in the first nine verses and all of [John 10](#). There are the sheep — easily identified as the flock that Jesus intends to lead into good pasture (v. 9), those whom he knows by name and who recognize his voice (vv. 3–4, 14), those whom he intends to defend against thieves and robbers (vv. 1, 8, 10) and whom he wishes to join together with all others who, listening to his voice, will come into the one fold (v. 16). Jesus will effect all this because he is the Good Shepherd (vv. 11, 14), loved by the Father because he will lay down his life for the sheep. It is this act of total, loving self-sacrifice that is mentioned again and again as the central motif. Appearing first in v.11 as the good shepherd title is introduced, it occurs again in verses 15, 17, and twice in verse 18.

Though the shepherd-sheep metaphor was well known in the OT, this laying down of the shepherd’s life is something new. It is the characteristic function of Jesus. He is *the* good (*kalos*) shepherd,

especially because of his willing self-sacrifice

All who came before me

Just before our gospel reading, in v.8, Jesus says: “*All who came are thieves and robbers.*” There cannot be a sweeping rejection of all OT figures – especially given that Jesus has already made references to Abraham and Moses as positive witnesses to him (5:45-46; 8:56). Jesus is referring to the kings of Israel condemned in Ezekiel 34, but also current day leaders of Israel, who treated the man born blind so badly. Of such leaders, Jesus says, *the sheep did not listen to them*. The man born blind certainly did not listen to them, but he listened to Jesus. Those who belong to Jesus, the true shepherd, hear his voice and not those of the false shepherds

The Good Shepherd

At v.11, the focus shifts to Jesus’ self-revelation as the good shepherd: “*I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*” The identification of Jesus as the shepherd was implicit in the figure of speech in vv.1-5, but it is made explicit for the first time here. As before, the positive image of the good shepherd (vv.11, 14-16) is contrasted with a negative image, that of the hired hand (vv.12-13).

The “I am” saying of v.11 is explained exclusively in metaphorical language in vv.11b-13. That is, after the initial use of a first-person singular pronoun, Jesus never refers to himself directly again. Instead, he draws on images derived from the OT to explain what he means by “good shepherd.” The adjective “good” (*kalos*) also has the meaning “model” or “true,” and the reference point for what constitutes a model shepherd is set by the image of God as the good shepherd in Ezekiel 34. According to Ezek 34:11-16, God the good shepherd cares for the sheep, rescuing them from the places to which they have been scattered, feeding them, and tending to the weak, the injured, and the lost. By identifying himself as the good shepherd of Ezekiel 34, Jesus thus identifies himself as fulfilling God’s promises and doing God’s work (cf. 4:34; 17:4). And Jesus is holding up that he is the fulfillment of the promises of Ezekiel 34: 11 - “*For thus says the Lord GOD: Look! I myself will search for my sheep*” and all the other promise in the verses that follow:

As a shepherd examines his flock while he himself is among his scattered sheep, so will I examine my sheep. I will deliver them from every place where they were scattered on the day of dark clouds. I will lead them out from among the peoples and gather them from the lands; I will bring them back to their own country and pasture them upon the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and every inhabited place in the land. In good pastures I will pasture them; on the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down on good grazing ground; in rich pastures they will be pastured on the mountains of Israel. I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest—oracle of the Lord GOD. The lost I will search out, the strays I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, and the sick I will heal; but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd them in judgment. (Ez 34:12-16)

God Himself will come to do those things - and Jesus announced that “*I am,*” the divine name, God present among us to fulfill the promises of God.

A Willingness to Lay down his life. Verse 11 pushes beyond the imagery of Ezekiel 34 in its reference to the shepherd’s willingness to lay down his life for the sheep. A possible OT antecedent may lie in the messianic oracle of Zech 13:7-9, in which the death of the shepherd is required so that the flock can be purified. Verse 11 may also have points of contact with Palestinian shepherding practices; a good shepherd may indeed have to give up his life to prevent the decimation of his flock by wild animals. Yet the reference to the shepherd laying down his life is cast in a distinctive Johannine idiom, so that the reader of the Gospel cannot help hearing in Jesus’ words an allusion to his own death. Verses 15 and 17-18 will make those associations with the death of Jesus explicit, but at

this point Jesus stays within the metaphor of shepherding. He works to build the interpretive frame of reference before he turns more directly to his own life and death.

¹² *A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them.* ¹³ *This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep.*

The image of the hired hand in vv.12-13 has many echoes of the image of the bad shepherd in Ezekiel 34:5-6, 8-10. It also recalls descriptions of the bad shepherd in Jer 23:1-3 and Zech 11:15, 17. The common denominator in these OT portraits of the bad shepherd and the picture of the hired hand is the shepherd's primary concern for his own well-being at the expense of the flock's well-being. In each of these portraits, the flock is scattered and devoured by animals as a result of the shepherd's neglect. This picture of the hired shepherd's lack of concern for the sheep (v.13) stands in marked contrast to the picture of the good shepherd, who cares for the sheep to the point of laying down his life for them.

In Relationship with God. ¹⁴ *I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me,* ¹⁵ *just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep.* ¹⁶ *I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd.*

Jesus' self-revelation in vv.14-16 weaves back and forth seamlessly between figurative and non-figurative speech. Jesus begins by once again identifying himself with the image of the good shepherd (v.14), but explains that image primarily by making reference to his ministry and relationship to God, rather than by staying within the images of sheep and shepherd as he did in vv.11-13. This move between figurative and non-figurative speech results in some ambiguity in interpreting Jesus' words. This ambiguity is immediately evident in v.14b. When Jesus speaks of his relationship with his own, he may be speaking within the shepherding figure (cf. vv.3-4), but the expressions "my own" (*to ema*) and "his own" (*hoi idioi*) also describe Jesus' relationship to his followers in John (e.g., 1:11; 13:1; 17:9-10). Verse 14b suggests that the line between metaphorical and direct speech is very thin in this section of the discourse.

This is especially evident in the use of the verb for "know" (*ginōskō*) in vv.14b-15a. Jesus' words in v.14b may be read as an elaboration of the shepherd imagery of vv.4-5, but v.15a explicitly moves outside of the shepherd imagery by pointing to Jesus' relationship to the Father. Verse 15a provides a working definition of knowledge in John: knowledge is not a cognitive category, but is a category of relationship. The true measure and model of knowledge is God's and Jesus' mutual knowledge. Jesus is thus the good shepherd not simply because of his relationship to the sheep, but also because of his relationship to God.

Verse 15b makes the connection of Jesus' death and the shepherd's death (cf. v.11) explicit. The juxtaposition of vv.15a and 15b suggests again that Jesus lays down his life not simply because of his relationship to the sheep (as in the image of the shepherd in v.11) but because of his relationship with God. The reference in v.16 to other sheep has particular relevance in the setting of Jesus' conversation with the Pharisees. Jesus is suggesting here that his flock is not limited to the sheep of Israel and that the community created by his death will include people from outside of Israel (cf. 12:32). The mark of this expanded flock will be that "they will listen to my voice," a trait that distinguishes the flock from the Jewish leaders who neither listen to nor know Jesus' voice (cf. 8:43; 10:6). To hear Jesus' voice is the mark of faithfulness to Jesus and his word (cf. 5:24; 10:27; 12:47).

The final image of v.16 returns fully to the sheep metaphor. The vision of a united flock recalls the final promise of Ezek 34:31: "*You, my sheep, you are the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God.*" Jesus once again positions himself as the fulfillment of promises traditionally associated with God.

Jesus the good shepherd will bring about unity in the flock through his relationship with God and his death (v.15).

A Theological Summary

“This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father” (John 10:17-18)

Verses 17-18 form the conclusion to the discourse. In these verses, the shepherd metaphor is abandoned completely and Jesus speaks directly about his death and relationship with God. These verses focus on three theological themes that are essential to understanding the death of Jesus in John.

First, these verses place Jesus’ death fully in the context of his relationship with God. Verse 17 contains the first linkage of “love” (*agapaō*) with Jesus’ death in the Fourth Gospel. God’s love for the world (3:16) and for Jesus (3:35) are already known to the reader, and this verse adds a new dimension to that love. God loves Jesus because Jesus lives out God’s commandment fully (v.18). In the Fourth Gospel, the core commandment that Jesus gives his disciples is that they love one another *just as he has loved them* (13:34). The sign of Jesus’ love for them is that he is willing to lay down his life for them (cf. 13:1; 15:13). Jesus thus obeys the same commandment from God that he passes on to his disciples, to live fully in love. It is wrong to read these verses as saying that Jesus wins the Father’s love through his death; rather, his death is the ultimate expression of the love relationship that already exists and defines who he is and how he enacts God’s will for the world.

Second, our verses make clear that Jesus’ laying down his life is an act he freely chooses as an expression of his obedience to God. Jesus is not a victim in death nor a martyr against his will, but is in control of his own death (v.18b; see 19:11, 17). The Gospel story has already demonstrated this in the authorities’ inability to arrest Jesus (7:30, 44) and his control of the hour (2:4; 7:30; 8:20).

Third, the summary verses point to the inseparability of Jesus’ death and resurrection in John. Jesus’ enactment of God’s work is incomplete until he returns to the Father through his resurrection and ascension (13:1; 17:1, 4-5). Jesus reveals God’s will for the world not only in his death, but also in his victory over death through his return to God. When Jesus lays down his life, therefore, it is to the end of taking it up again. In this summary, Jesus speaks of himself as the agent of both his death and his resurrection (cf. 2:19-21). That is, whereas elsewhere in the NT God raises Jesus (e.g., Acts 2:24; 10:40; 1 Cor 15:15; Gal 1:1), here Jesus speaks of taking up his own life again. The “power” (*exousia*) that Jesus has to lay down his life and to take it up again is given to him by God (see 17:2 and Jesus’ statement about Pilate’s “power” at 19:11). These verses point to the complete union of God and Jesus in their work (cf. 4:34), a union that receives explicit expression at 10:30.

More Division

“Again there was a division among the Jews because of these words.” (John 10:19) The schism among the “Jews” in response to Jesus’ words recalls the schism among them in response to his healing of the blind man (9:16) in which some attempted to discredit Jesus by calling him a sinner. Although outside our gospel reading here the charge will be demon possession (v.20; cf. 7:20; 8:48). Others are willing to trust the evidence of the miracle itself. This trajectory makes clear that the Fourth Evangelist intends that a decision about Jesus’ identity must hold together both his words and his works.

Notes

John 10:1 sheepfold: a low stone wall open to the sky. **gate:** The word translated ‘gate’ is *thyra*, which means ‘door’, and the word translated ‘sheepfold’ is *aulē*, which means ‘court’ or ‘courtyard’. When

translated correctly it is clear that the parable is set in the village, not the open country. **thief and a robber**: the expression robber (*lēstēs*) is sometimes used to describe revolutionaries; in Jesus' day this term was sometimes used of the Zealot movement. Given v.12, it is a possibility that *lēstēs* is referring to those who would use messianic hopes for their own nationalistic ventures and aspirations.

John 10:3 gatekeeper: Allegorical readings of this passage attempt to identify the gatekeeper with some figure in the conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities.

John 10:4 driven out: the word (*ekballein*) normally means “to cast out” – seemingly lending the sense that the sheep are reluctant to leave the confines of the sheepfold. **recognize his voice**: the Pharisees do not recognize Jesus, but the people of God, symbolized by the blind man, do. Where John 9 relied on the sense of sight to fuel the narrative, John 10 adds the sense of hearing to make the parallel distinction.

John 10:5 not follow a stranger: Some commentaries suggest that several flocks are kept within a single sheepfold, thus the separation occurs when a single shepherd calls out his sheep and those sheep respond, while the remaining sheep do not because they do not recognize the shepherd's voice. This interpretation is far from certain and there is no clear reference to a multiplicity of flocks elsewhere in the immediate text.

John 10:6 figure of speech: John uses a different word for illustrative speech than the “parable” of the synoptic gospels, but the idea is similar.

John 10:7 I am the gate for the sheep: There are several ancient manuscripts which read “shepherd for the sheep.” Thus some scholars speculate “gate” may be a scribal error associated with an underlying Aramaic expression. Perhaps, but given that v.9 repeats the image of the gate in a context that would make “shepherd” a strange usage, most scholars agree that “gate” is appropriate for v.7's usage. There are others who note that in some instances the shepherd slept across the opening of the sheepfold thus acting as a gate for all practical purposes. Perhaps relevant, in Islam, one of the monikers for a religious leader is *Bāb* (gate) of knowledge. In John 10:7-8, the figure is of a gate for the shepherd to come to the sheep; in John 10:9-10, the figure is of a gate for the sheep to come in and go out.

John 10:8 all who come (before me): The phrase “before me” is omitted in many good early manuscripts and versions. The larger phrase is perhaps a reference to the long history of God's people and its leadership. This is difficult in that it implies criticism of patriarchs, prophets and righteous of the OT era. Brown (286) considers this too drastic an interpretation.

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