

Welcome Prayer

Welcome all to this sharing time. Let's begin with Prayer:

Our Father, once more we gather in the name of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to worship, and to share. We look to you, Lord, to guide us and enlighten us, and fill us with your Spirit. Guide our thoughts and words, and forgive us our difficulties and our failure to be your people. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

HYMN 80 by Walter Chalmers Smith 1824—1908

1. Immortal invisible, God only wise
In light, inaccessible, hid from our eyes.
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.
2. Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light
Nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might:
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above,
Thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.
3. To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
In all life thou livest, the true life of all:
We blossom and flourish, as leaves on a tree,
And wither and perish; but nought changeth thee.
4. Great Father of Glory, pure Father of light,
Thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
All laud we would render; O help us to see,
'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee;

BIBLE READING:

- John 10 vs 1-16

"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognise a stranger's voice."

Jesus used this figure of speech but they did not understand what he was telling them. Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, "I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate, whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find

pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.”

Message

Have you heard some folks say (about different faiths) it doesn't matter which one you choose--its just many pathways to the same destination? Really!! I have even heard Christians say this!!?? That is not what our Lord tells us. John's gospel and Jesus' word are very clear - Jesus is THE Gate.

Let's think on Jesus' parable. The shepherd in the ancient middle east was the carer and sole guardian of the flock, owned by a wealthy landowner living comfortably somewhere else. Shepherding was a tough, dirty, and at times dangerous job. The shepherd would find a good site to serve as a pen, maybe a cave, or natural enclosure, or he could build one from branches, or stones with a small gate where he would sleep at night, across the entrance. Any wild animals or thieves would have to get past the shepherd before they could attack the sheep – therefore the shepherd was, in fact, prepared to give up his own life to save the lives of the flock. The shepherd was also an outsider in the community smelly, unwashed and probably a loner who did not “fit” and could not attend synagogue etc.

In our early years at Semaphore Methodist Church there was a scruffy man who would sometimes come into the Church. “Jim” was not always welcome due to his noise and street style appearance. When he died some years later he left the church \$480,000!! What the Church represented to him was highly valued, clearly there was a deep connection with his Lord. In this parable Jesus knew that the main character would not be “kosher” with the “norm” in Jewish society. But then what's new about that? In His ministry there are many examples: the woman with blood, the adulteress, the blind man, and Matt 25:36 -- one of the planks of the Christian life—the care of the less fortunate.

There is also a warning attached to the story. Not the only time does Jesus warn about those entering the sheepfold by another way, “a thief and a robber” – there is only one way in, Christ, who leads to a unique destination with him and the Father.

There is more to Jesus' warning though.

The fastest growing faith community in Australia is not Christian—our empty church buildings attest to this. In the developing suburbs North of Adelaide you can see Buddhist temples standing in the midst of nothing—waiting for the community to come. NO longer is the Christian faith at the centre of life. I think its scary! In the words of Dr Geoffrey Blainey, et al (Prof. Isabel Gil too) the underlying foundations of our country are the rule of law, the role of family, and the Christian faith. Weaken any of these values and you weaken our very existence as a Christian democracy (Romans 10:14-15).

The good news is that the Gate of truth is open to all, that is what our faith brings to the world. No matter how much war, evil, destruction and confusion abounds there is always a way to reconciliation through the Gate opened by and through the Good Shepherd.

PRAYERS FOR THE WORLD.

(Barnabas Aid) Focus: Jennifer, a brick kiln worker in Pakistan, eight years old and slave to debt.

Lord God, we are left in awe of the faith of Jennifer, and others like her labouring in heat and poverty of indentured slavery. Helping her family at her own cost. These Christian families just exist day by day. Lord, draw near to them. May we be generous of purse and heart to help free them.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

HYMN 81: by Henry William Baker 1821-1877

1. The King of Love my shepherd is whose goodness faileth never
I nothing lack if I am his and he is mine for ever.
2. Where streams of living water flow my ransomed soul he leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow with food celestial feedeth.
3. Pervese and foolish oft I strayed, but yet in love he sought me;
And on his shoulder gently laid, and home rejoicing brought me.
4. In death's dark vale I fear no ill with Thee, dear Lord, beside me:
Thy rod and staff me comfort still, Thy cross before to guide me.
5. Thou spreadst a table in my sight; Thy unction grace bestoweth
And oh what transport of delight from Thy pure chalice floweth!
6. And so through all the length of days Thy goodness faileth never:
Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise within Thy house for ever.

Blessing: (Hebrews 13:20)

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing of his will.

Amen.

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