

# 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – April 26, 2026

*John 10:1-10*

Yesterday we spent the day at Pastor Shawn's funeral. It was such a complicated emotional day. On one hand, the sudden loss has been devastating. So many are mourning, extremely saddened by his unexpected death. But then, every funeral is also a celebration of the work of Jesus.

Especially in this Easter season, we rejoice in the resurrection and knowing that our loved ones will be united with Jesus in their own resurrection. And while we heard that good news, we also celebrated Pastor Shawn's life. His devoted ministry of 25 years. There was a typo on his death certificate. It was supposed to say that he had a pacemaker, but instead it read "peacemaker." A fitting typo for a man devoted to God and to walking alongside God's people.

I also found it fitting that we celebrated his life on the eve of Good Shepherd Sunday. A day where we talk about Jesus being our shepherd. Keeping us safe Guiding us along right paths. Pastors are often thought of as shepherds of their flock. You all being the flock. And that metaphor works sometimes. More often though, I feel my ministry is better described as a sheep along with you. Trusting in Jesus to lead all of us as we walk together in this ministry.

But all too often, I hear of pastors treating their role not as a shepherd, nor a sheep, but in our gospel, more like the gatekeeper. Our gospel on this good shepherd Sunday is how Jesus is the gate for his sheep. His sheep being all of us. All of God's children. And I was stuck on how we like to act as gatekeepers ourselves.

So I thought about showing up today in sweatpants and a T-shirt, looking pretty disheveled. Can you imagine? I know it's not the most professional look, and I would have only done it for the sermon reference. But, It's not an original thought. There was a story that has been passed around since I was a young Christian myself. About a new pastor who was starting this Sunday at a church, and they hadn't met this pastor before, so they didn't know what they

looked like. So, this pastor sat out on the front step before church, dressed in a disheveled way, to give the impression that they were homeless. They wanted to see how the congregation reacted.

Would they welcome in this person? Or walk right by them? Then, as the service was getting ready to begin, the pastor comes in and sits down in a pew. Just waiting to see how people would respond. Would they be kind and friendly? Or ignore this person because it was awkward.

Well, in the story, they ignored the supposed homeless person until it was time for the service to begin. Even though these folks were likely taught that everyone is a child of God, created in the image of God, and deserving of love, they didn't live out what they had been taught. They didn't welcome the Stranger into the House of God. They acted as the gatekeeper.

Gatekeeping has become a word that gets thrown around a lot lately. But it's obviously not a new term or concept. Gatekeeping is literally just being the one to open and close the gate to allow certain people to enter. The "old guard" tend to be the gate keepers of the church. Deciding who is welcome and who is not. Or deciding what behaviors are allowed. What is acceptable or not. But we are not the gate keepers of the house of God. That's not our role and has never been our role. We are merely the sheep dependent on Jesus to open that gate for us.

And he warns of the people who are trying to be the gate keepers before Jesus. Calling them thieves in the night. The church as a whole has done a lot of gatekeeping in its time. And all it has done is push people away from the kingdom of God. It's steals people away from experiencing God's grace and love, because we determine if they are not worthy for some reason. But that was never for us to decide. That is what makes us thieves. We steal away opportunities for God to work.

Jesus is the gate. And we know to follow him. We know his voice. By focusing more on following Jesus, and focusing less on determining who comes through that gate, we can participate better in the whole kingdom of God. Embracing

those different from us. Welcoming those who enter here wearing less than “ideal” clothing. Being in community with the people we want to exclude. Letting Jesus handle the gate and we focus on following him.

We already have the shepherd who is leading us. We are only tasked to follow. Listen to his words. Embody his grace. Welcome the stranger. Especially those we don't want to. We cannot be the thieves stealing God's love for ourselves. May we share it. And share it abundantly. So that on that final day, when our shepherd leads us through the gate, may we be known as the sheep of God's pasture. Who embodied God's love and grace to the flock. May we lead people to God through our love and actions. And allow Jesus to be our gatekeeper and lead us to him. Amen.