**Sermon Text for June 9, 2013**

**By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema**

**Exodus 27:16, John 10:1-10**

**“The Gate”**

 I’ve had such great opportunities to be in places where very well known gates have been present. In 1990 I slept in front of the Brandenburg Gate in East Germany on a park bench right after the wall fell down. I’ll never forget celebration New Year’s outside of the famous façade with the gateway of the Alamo in the background. Or the Arch of Constantine in Rome which served as a gate to that eternal city. There is something about gates that intrigue me either for whom they want to keep out or who they want to keep in. The gate entering the Jewish Ghetto quarters in Prague was chilling.

 But the Gold Gate in Jerusalem remains the most interest gateway that I have seen. There is the belief by some Jews that when the Messiah comes back he will walk through that gate and as a result will bring about the end times which will result in the eternal rule of Israel over all of the world. So, in the 15th century when the Islamic rulers had control over Israel they decided to permanently seal off the Golden Gate, and it has been sealed off since then. When you look down from the Mount of Olives you can see the archway that is encased in cement, and there are guards there in case anyone has illusions of being the Messiah and wanting to make their way through the gate. There is a real fear of just who might make it through that gate.

 Today, our Savior calls himself the gate in our Scripture. And it is in context of describing who he is and why we need to understand who he is that he shares this metaphor with us. Do you know why we are reading the Gospel of John and why I chose this Gospel first. It really has nothing to do with my preferences…it doesn’t. Look at the end of the Gospel, in chapter 20:21 and it tells us why: “These are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” We are reading John so that each and every one of us will choose to have life in the name of Jesus.

 And this purpose is reflected so very clearly in the verses that we are going to be reading today. The singularity of Jesus as the Messiah and the uniqueness of the life that he provides to all of us, is why we are reading John as a whole, and is what is highlighted in our verses today. Today is all about Jesus and understand how to go through him, our one and only mediator, the gate, in order to experience life.

 **READ**

If you will notice the title of the sermon is “The gate”, but that word, gate, is only reflected in the translation in our pews in the verses that we read today. Many of the other translations have what other word, who has another version in front of them? That’s right, door. Thura is the word that is used, and it is used more commonly to describe door. But because these verses are steeped in the bucolic references of sheep and shepherds and sheep normally stayed in enclosures that required gates over doors, so the interpreters chose to use gate here. Not a problem, we can make that work.

 In fact, the first 6 verses have more to do with shepherds and sheep, even if the word gate is used 5 times, so that we are going to be focusing on the shepherd imagery next week as we cover it for Father’s Day. Our focus today, however, is on verses 7 and 9 when Jesus identifies himself as the gate. There are some aspects of this identification hat we have to uplift as we make our way through this Scripture. First, if you notice our Exodus Scripture for today it refers to the gate that was a part of the Tabernacle.

 Go to Exodus and you will remember that while the Israelites traveled they would set up a Tabernacle which was a mobile and makeshift structure that served as a place of worship. It was like a little moveable church. For this place of worship there was one, and only one, entry into the tabernacle. They weren’t very worried about fire codes back then. I don’t care if you were the high priest or the guy who sold the doves for the sacrifices, if you wanted to be in relationship with God, if you wanted to worship God, if you wanted to discover God’s presence, there was one and only one entrance into the tabernacle where you could do that. That entrance was for everyone and there was no distinction among persons of who could or who could not enter there.

 So in these verses, starting in verse 1, Jesus makes clear that there is only one true gate that provides salvation and a pasture. Verse 1, anyone who doesn’t enter by the gate is a thief, the one who enters by the gate is the shepherd, I am the gate, says Jesus.

 It is not only today that the relativism of God is a popular idea. It has been said that all religions lead to God. My John Scripture tells me not that there are many gates through which you can pass in order to be saved, but only one, and that is Jesus Christ. The Israelites were faced with pantheism every turn of the road along their journey. God wanted to be sure that they remembers that the Lord your God is one God, and only one God, not a compilation of gods that are all equal. I’m not sure why that is so offensive to some Christians to hear me say that especially since a Muslim, a Jew, or a Buddhist, or anyone else who is not a follower of Jesus Christ has absolutely no desire to obtain a Christian salvation. That is simply not on their short list of things to do before they die.

 This isn’t the only place in Scripture where we read about the singleness of Jesus as the gate. Look at Matthew 7:13-14. Jesus tells his disciples: “Enter through the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who take it.” Who is the gate? Jesus is, and he is the only one by whom we can be saved. Few follow him as that gate that leads to salvation.

 There is a beautiful Psalm that speaks of this gate and its uniqueness. Psalm 118 and specifically verse 20: This is the gate of the Lord, the righteous shall enter through it. Also in this Psalm it goes on to speak about the cornerstone that the builders rejected which is an obvious prophecy to our Savior Jesus Christ, if nothing else it is a Scripture that we often attribute to his character. In an age of relativity, the singleness of Jesus as the gate has to be a non-negotiable.

 A video went viral this past week of a senior who tore up his approved speech