



Sermon for Sunday, April 3, 2022
“Following Jesus in a Liminal Time” | Fifth Sunday of Lent
Pastor Charlie Berthoud | John 10:7-10

Jesus said:

- I am the bread of life
- I am the light of the world
- I am the vine; you are the branches
- I am the good shepherd

Over the past four weeks, we’ve been reflecting on those “I am” statements, with the hope of learning more about Jesus, so that we could grow as followers of Jesus.

Today we turn to arguably the least known I am statement—the ugly duckling, the last one picked for the playground kickball game.

Jesus said “I am the gate for the sheep” or by other translations, “I am the door for the sheep.”

He says this in John 10, the same chapter where he says “I am the good shepherd” which was our focus last week, so the image of door and good shepherd flow together.

Jesus says the sheep recognize his voice, which reminds us of the gospel account of the Transfiguration, when God’s voice speaks to the disciples on a mountain: This is my son, the beloved; listen to him.

The sheep listen for the voice of the shepherd and follow the shepherd through the gate or the door toward the pasture and toward new life.

In our reading for today, there is also an acknowledgment of the reality of evil in the world, along with the promise of salvation. The Greek word for save used here and many other places is *sozo*, which doesn't simply mean save for the afterlife, as it's often interpreted.

Sozo means to rescue, to heal, to make well—here and now. Remember Jesus taught us to pray, “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

So when Jesus says “I am the door” and he seems to be inviting his followers to come through the door, away from evil and toward healing and wholeness, into something new, something here and now.

Door and gate imagery appears many places in the Bible, with the clear implication that doors are significant for transitions and being alert.

Early in the Bible, in Genesis 4, God warns Cain,

“Sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

In Exodus 12, Hebrew doors were marked with blood in the first Passover

They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts....The blood shall be a sign.... when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

In Matthew 7, in the sermon on the mount, Jesus teaches:

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 find it.

In Revelation, the last book of the Bible, we read:

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.

It's worth noting that faithful Jews have a mezuzah hung in the door. A mezuzah is a little scroll with scripture to remind us of God's love and our calling to love.

And we should remember that Martin Luther sparked the Reformation by posting his 95 theses on a door.

Finally, we are approaching Easter, when we celebrate resurrection, and the Bible tells us that the stone was rolled away from the tomb. In other words the door of the tomb was opened.

So doors are important, especially since Jesus suggests the door leads to life in all its fullness, something translated as abundant life. I'm reading from the New Century Version. Listen for God's word.

⁷ So Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the door for the sheep. ⁸ All the people who came before me were thieves and robbers. The sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door, and the person who enters through me will be saved and will be able to come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ A thief comes to steal and kill and destroy, but I came to give life—life in all its fullness.
--New Century Version

Do you know what the word "limen" means?

I didn't until a few years ago, when I started seeing the word limen and liminality in articles about the church.

According to wiktionary limen is:

a threshold, an entrance, a commencement, a doorway.

Specifically the Latin root of limen means the bottom of a doorway.

Liminality is understood as a transitional time, an uncertain time, when a person, group, or organization is on the threshold of something new.

Several months ago, I read a book recommended by pastor friends. It's called *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going: Leading in A Liminal*

Season, by well-respected church consultant Susan Beaumont.

The author offers examples of liminal situations: airports, twilight, New Year's Day. These are all times and places of uncertainty and hope, a time when you're neither here nor there.

The book was published just before Covid, but certainly the Covid era is a liminal season for the church for the world, as we figure out where we're going.

In the book, the author cites Richard Rohr, who writes:

The liminal space is "the realm where God can best get at us because our false certitudes are finally out of the way. This is the sacred space where the old world is able to fall apart, and a bigger world is revealed."
(p. 4)

The political chaos in the US feels like a liminal season for our country, as we wrestle with complicated issues of race, elections, economics, and more.

We are in a liminal season in our church. Not only are we dealing with the Covid situation and what it means to be a church community in a time of pandemic, but we also have multiple staff transitions going on.

Plus, we're making a major reinvestment in our building with a wonderful new heating system, replacing the used one that was installed in the 1950s. As we make this big investment in the building, I'm encouraging Elders, Deacons, and staff to think about new ways to use the building, new ways to open the doors to our neighbors.

In any liminal time, in a transitional time, there is uncertainty and anxiety, as we face an unknown future, looking at territory yet unexplored.

As we face multiple liminal situations in our world, our county, and our church, we, as Christians, need to remember who we are and whose we are.

During Lent, our focus is on Jesus, with the hope of reclaiming and renewing our Christian identity. My hope is that we'll be able

- to hear afresh the teaching of Jesus
- to take on the mind of Christ
- to ask what would Jesus have us do, as Clara encouraged us last week

Today we welcome eight new members, and soon we welcome several teens in the confirmation class. All of those new members will affirm Jesus as Lord and Savior, and as we continue to ponder these “I am” statements in John’s gospel, I hope we all can be renewed in our faith.

I give thanks that

Jesus is:

the bread of life that nourishes us

The light of the world that guides us

The vine that connects us

The good shepherd that tends us and calls us

And Jesus is the door, the one who invites to step across the threshold, into something new, something uncertain, but with the promise of green pastures, still waters, and life in all its fullness. Amen.