



Create a peaceful space to pause, and allow yourself to feel God's presence alongside you, as near to you as your own breath. In following the reflection below, as a church we will draw closer to God and to one another as we grow in faith and deepen our sense of belonging to God.

### **John 10:1-10 'Jesus the Gate for the Sheep'**

<sup>1</sup>Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. <sup>2</sup>The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' <sup>6</sup>Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

<sup>7</sup>So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

Apologies – this morning I've shamelessly chosen one of my favourite Bible passages. The above is from the NRSV but I actually prefer verse ten in the Good News version – 'life in all its fullness'.

Jesus is using (unfamiliar to most of us) pastoral imagery of shepherding and farming, so with passage we have to put ourselves in the shoes of the hearers. But who was Jesus speaking these well-known words to? The start of Chapter 10 doesn't tell us – it's the beginning of the speech. In Chapter 9 Jesus is with various people, but the teaching he's giving seems to be mostly directed not to the crowds, or the disciples, but actually to *the Pharisees...* who Jesus clashes with again and again in the Fourth Gospel. Presumably they'd have understood the metaphorical agrarian imagery... just not the theological message Jesus was proclaiming.



Thinking of gates, this one on the left must be one of the worst gates in the known world. It's down at Holywell by the café and chalets. It's metal, sturdy, and always firmly locked shut. The foreboding 'No Entry' sign on it leaves you in no doubt to keep out and keep away. Fine. Except that as you can see, it's on the edge of the promenade, and you can easily just walk around it with no trouble at all! Now I can understand a 'Keep Out' sign or 'Private' sign by the chalets, but a pointless gate? The workers erecting it must have been smiling the whole way through the job!

Do you think of Jesus as being a 'closed gate' – keeping us in, safe and protected from all harm? Or an 'open gate' who draws us in to his loving presence, and sends us out again into the world to serve him anew? Both have their merits for our understanding of who Jesus is, maybe at different times for us. However, for you and I today, the message is essentially the same: 'Life in all its fullness' is to be found in God's love for the world through Jesus Christ.

**Prayer:** God of sheep and shepherds, pasture and protection, gates and gate-keeping,  
Keep us safe in your love when we need gathering and holding.  
Keep us strong and serving when we're out in the world for you.  
Grant us the knowledge and experience of your eternal love,  
that you offer to all your people, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

