

Jesus is very important to us. He loves us. He teaches us. He heals us. He lives in our hearts. But sometimes when Jesus talks in the Bible he says some things that can be hard to understand. We have to think about what he says for a while to figure out exactly what he means. For instance, at other times in the Gospel of John Jesus says, "I am the bread of life," and "I am the true vine," and "I am the way and the truth and the life."

Today we heard Jesus talk about himself like this two times. Does anyone remember what Jesus says about himself the first time? He says "I am the Good Shepherd." That's interesting because I don't know any stories about Jesus taking care of sheep. We think he was a woodworker because his father Joseph was a woodworker. So if he is not really a shepherd why would he say, "I am the good shepherd"? What if he is saying it to help us understand something about him that is like a shepherd?

What does a shepherd do? He or she takes care of sheep. Why do sheep need to be taken care of? Do they have fierce teeth or claws? Are they really fast runners? Are sheep really big like elephants? If they are none of these things, what is the shepherd's job? [Listen for them, protect them, loves them, keep them safe, feed them, keep other animals away]. So the shepherd keeps the sheep safe. Who does Jesus take care of? Is it sheep or could it be you and me? So if Jesus is the Good Shepherd to you and me, what is he doing for us? He is protecting us, loving us, keeping us safe, and feeding us.

Jesus said something else about himself in this Gospel lesson. Does anyone remember what he said? [If no one responds read the second part of the passage. Use the Gospel Book.]

That is very interesting. Jesus says, "I am the gate." How can a person be a gate? Let's think about what he might mean. Why do we have gates? What do they do for us? [Listen for: keep animals in, keep other things out, keep us safe.] So gates keep out things we don't want, keep in things we do want, and help us feel safe. So how is Jesus like a gate? In those very same ways.

So between these two statements that Jesus makes what does Jesus want us to feel when he says, "I am the Good Shepherd" and "I am the gate"? He wants us to feel cared for, safe, joyful, and most of all loved. He wants us to know that he knows each of us by name. He wants us to know that when we listen carefully we will hear and know his voice. He wants us to know that he knows us by name. He wants us to follow where he leads.

Let me read these parts again. [after reading] Jesus sometimes talks to us in ways that may not make sense at first, but when we think about it he is telling us somethings that are very important.

To help remember that let's sing a song that I bet you know. You can join as soon as you recognize it. [Sing "Jesus Loves Me."]

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St. Stephen's Episcopal Church  
Richmond, VA

Palmer Hall Chapel 9 a.m. Sunday  
May 7, 2017  
The 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, Year A

Keep Jesus in your heart just as he keeps you in his.

