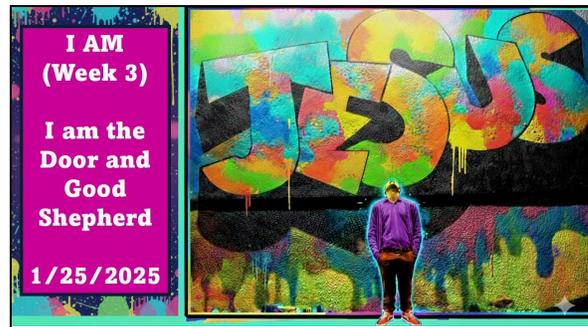


I AM (Week 3) - I Am the Door and Good Shepherd  
**Yesterday's Sermon Summary**

1. In yesterday's sermon, we covered the 3rd and 4th "I Am" statements about Jesus in John's gospel (found in [Jn. 10.7-15](#)). At first glance, they appear unrelated but after reading the text in its original historical setting, you realize they're not.



2. These two "I Am" statements occur within a larger - and much beloved - passage ([Jn. 10.1-21](#)) and it's impossible to do justice to all that text says in just one sermon. So we just focused on the statements themselves: "I am the good shepherd" and "I am the door/gate."

3. Let's start with "I am the good shepherd" (Jn. 10.11, 14) First, in the Old Testament God is often described as the shepherd of His people so Christ here is being compared to God, and we should expect Christ to play the same role in our lives that God does. For us within the Christian faith 2000 years later, this may not seem like much of claim, but, of course, back during the first decades following Jesus' life, you can bet that it was.

4. By calling Christ a "shepherd," John is clearly defining what we are - and what we're not. We are sheep, we are not the shepherd of our own lives. United Church of Christ pastor Vicki Harper muses that we as Americans often live our lives focused on 1st person pronouns: this is what "I" want, this is "my" plan, this is what's best for "me" or "mine," etc. But to be a sheep and relinquish the role of shepherd is to find the freedom of 2nd person pronouns, that is, all that we need someone else - a "You" - to do and be for us. In her words, "Sometimes only second person pronouns will do. They allow us to receive what we cannot produce. They allow us to be given that which we cannot accomplish on our own."

5. And Christ is said to be a "good" shepherd. This goodness is multifaceted: like God, Christ's character can be trusted and He always has our, not merely His, best interest at heart. This flies in the face of too many view or feel about God in their lives, or what they might have experienced or heard from even other Christians. And our belief in Christ as a good shepherd really matters, because more negative alternatives affect us profoundly: as New Testament scholar Amy Jill Levine puts it pointedly and humorously, "I've got a good shepherd, and you've got a sadistic dentist."

6. The other reason Christ is a "good" shepherd is that He knows His sheep intimately and individually ([Jn. 10.14-15](#)). He's not merely interested in protecting and caring for the flock at large, but each and every one of us separately.

7. So if those are the basic components to the meaning of "I am the good shepherd," what about "I am the door/gate" (Jn 10.7, 9)? Here, Jesus is referring to the common practice among shepherds and herdsman in His day: at night they would build temporary pens for their flocks/herds in the fields, using brambles, bushes, sticks, etc., and they would lay across or near the opening to the enclosure in order to protect the flock. Hence, being the "door" is a function of being a "good shepherd."

8. So when Christ says twice in Jn. 10.11 and 15 that the good shepherd "lays down His life for the sheep," He has this specific function in mind. That phrase in Greek, incidentally, could also be translated, "put His life at risk for the sheep."

9. So when Christ calls Himself the door, He means to signal that we live in a treacherous world in which He will protect us. As biblical scholar N. T. Wright puts it, texts like this "...acknowledge that our lives are a battle and we don't have means or power to survive on our own." Sheep are by their nature skittish, always on high alert for predators. It's only when they're protected by the shepherd at night in their pen that they can lie down and rest. Human beings aren't that different.

10. At the heart of both "I Am" statements we considered this week is human neediness and Christ's protection, human lack and Christ's meeting that lack. Here's how Clement of Alexandria, an important theologian in the late 100s CE/early 200s CE) expressed that, pulling together so many biblical metaphors that express this one core truth: "In our sickness we need a Savior, in our wanderings, a guide, in our blindness someone to show us the light, in our thirst a fountain of living water that quenches those who drink from it forever. We dead people need life, we sheep need a shepherd, we children need a teacher. Yes, the whole world and everyone in it needs Jesus."

### **Being Sheep This Week**

Spend some time with the larger John 10 narrative about the good shepherd...there's so much to mine, appreciate, and live here:

- [John 10.1-21 NRSVUE](#)
- [John 10.1-21 MSG](#)

Of course, the most well-known psalm in the Old Testament is about God the good shepherd. You could hang out there this week too...including a few devotionals on that text:

- [Psalm 23 NRSVUE](#)
- [Psalm 23 MSG](#)
- [Are We There Yet?](#)
- [Now I Can Lie Down](#)
- [All My Needs, Already Supplied](#)
- [A Commercial Break](#)

Here's the Affirmation of Faith used at the end of yesterday's service about needing a shepherd. It would make a great focal point for your prayer and reflection this week:

- [Affirmation: Jesus, the Shepherd](#)