



At A Distance – Wednesday- May 6, 2020

Gates and Fences

“So again, Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.” John 10:7

Greetings Saints. It is great to be writing to you again on this stormy Wednesday here in our beautiful Pacific Northwest. The day shifting quickly from bright sunlight, to our familiar “Northwest Mist” to outright downpours and then back again. Our Earth Mother always changing and shifting, always presenting something new for us to see and appreciate.

This last Sunday, we spent our time with Gospel writer John’s story and image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. We learned about the two functions of the Shepherds Crook; the Staff for guidance and rescue and the Rod for protection. John beautifully blends these roles of guide and protector along with the image of Jesus as humble Shepherd to tell this powerful lesson of leadership for us. Great and holy leaders, whether spiritual or secular...humbly guide and humbly protect.

But John also gave us another image for us to think about in his Sacred Story last Sunday. And that is the image of Jesus as “The Gate”. Let’s have a look at perhaps what John and Jesus are getting at with this symbol.

I’ll start first by stating the obvious...**you don’t need a gate if you don’t have a fence.** Fences are interesting things. When we reduce the role and use of fences to the least common denominator, the irreducible minimum, fences are designed to do one thing and one thing only...to divide. They divide mine from yours, divide this from that, divide safe from unsafe, divide open from closed. Fences constrict, limit, impede and stop things.

The gate is the exact opposite of the fence. The gate is designed to connect, to be a portal, a way through the divide that the fence creates. The gate functions to join, to open, and to expand.

Jesus truly is the Gate for us spiritual travelers walking the Jesus Way. When we embrace and live our Baptismal covenant promises to love and respect each other, when we live into Jesus' "Good Shepherd" leadership model by both giving and receiving humble protection and guidance, we by-pass the fences that society puts up and we proudly walk through the Jesus Gate. I believe that Jesus knew that we would need a Spiritual Gate to walk through, because being human, we always find a way and a reason to erect new fences. Our tribalism and our distrust and fear of what and who we don't fully know and understand always seems to be a catalyst for new fence building activity. The Jesus Gate is about unification not separation.

When we are honest about it about it, religions and churches are some of the most efficient, effective and prolific fence builders that there are. Religions love to separate and divide, and we Christians are certainly not exempt from this tendency. Some Christians love to define who is "in" and who is "out" theologically, socially and culturally. In our not-so-recent past, Christians liked to "fence in" those who were believing "correctly" with the fancy label of "orthodoxy." Those who were believing "incorrectly," were identified with the not-so-fancy label of "heresy." This fence-building theological and liturgical tribalism led to some of Christianity's darker moments like the Inquisition, the Crusades, the Doctrine of Discovery, missionary xenophobia, First Nations "Residential Schools," segregated churches and regrettably the list goes on.

But gloriously through it all, the Jesus Gate remained and remains yet today...quietly and humbly open, welcoming and simple. With each new fence we built and build...Jesus continually brings us back to the Gate of the Jesus Way again inviting us to enter. Jesus again re-inviting us to enter The Gate with his 8-word statement of the true "orthodoxy" of the Jesus Way..."Love one another as I have loved you."

Blessings,

Father Joe