"I am the Door"
John 10:1-10

Over the summer we're looking at the famous 'I am' statements of Jesus. And as I said a couple of weeks ago, when you fill in that blank: 'I am…', in some way you're attempting to define yourself. Which is great, unless, of course, you have grandiose ideas about yourself.

When I was a medical student, as part of my psychiatry attachment, I had to attend an art therapy class. And it was being run for a group of adults with profound learning difficulties. And they were having a wonderful time. And paint was being splashed everywhere, and at times there was more paint on the floors and the tables than the paper, and you can just picture the fun and the chaos.

The only person who did not seem to be enjoying herself was the art teacher. And so I went and asked her how she came to be running a class like this, when she didn't appear to be all that happy about it. And she told me all about her training and background and what an artistic talent she had. Except, as she spoke, there seemed to me to be this gap between what she said about herself – which if I was to believe her, she was something akin to an internationally renowned portrait artist, and what I could see going on around me with all this beautiful chaos. And so being a bit forward, I asked her, if you're such a great artist, how come you're here, with paint going everywhere, and not exhibiting in London or New York. And she looked at me and she said, 'darling, I am art'.

And to be honest, I was lost for words. I mean, how do you recover when someone tells you that they are the embodiment of art?

But if that lady's claim was incredible, how much more incredible are the claims of Jesus of Nazareth. So far in this series we've heard him say, "I am the bread of life", "I am the light of the world" and "before Abraham was, I am". And to say such things about yourself is not simply to have an overinflated sense of your own importance. The 'I am' claims of Christ are in another league of delusion. Unless, of course, they are true.

And today we're going to look at the next one, which is no less gobsmacking: where Jesus says, 'I am the door.'

John 10:1-10

Now, as we begin, look at v6, where John tells us that what Jesus was saying here is a 'figure of speech.' And he says that because those Jesus was talking to clearly weren't getting it: v6 again, 'they did not understand what he was saying to them.' And whilst there are deeper reasons why they weren't getting it, on the surface Jesus does seem to be mixing his metaphors.

Now you know what a metaphor is: you use a word or a phrase to describe something else, even when it's not literally applicable. Like when you want to say something is easy, you say - 'it's a piece of cake' or 'it's as easy as falling off a log' – and that works. But a mixed metaphor 'it's as easy as falling off a piece of cake' does not work.

And in this passage, Jesus appears to mix his metaphors. Because he talks about sheep and shepherds and a door; and he says in v7, 'I am the door of the sheep.' But then, in v11, he says 'I am the good shepherd.' And you can hear that and think, 'er a door can't be a shepherd Jesus, that just doesn't work.'

Except, whilst a door cannot be a shepherd, what we're going to see is that Jesus can be both a door and a shepherd at one and the same time.

And next week, we're going to look at Jesus saying he is the good shepherd, and at what he says about false shepherds. But today we're going to look at him saying, "I am the door".

But before we do, one more thing by way of intro. When Jesus talks here of sheep and shepherds he is drawing on something deep in the psyche of the people of Israel. But most of us have probably never kept sheep, and our nations didn't arise out of a nomadic existence – so at first glance this picture may not work for you. But imagine someone talking to a room full of patriotic Brits about being an island people; or to a room of Americans about being a pilgrim people; or someone speaking of liberty, egality and fraternity, to the French, and you'll begin to understand something of what this picture might mean to the people who originally heard it. You see, you don't need to know much Bible to have heard of Psalm 23, where David says, 'the Lord is my shepherd.' And this idea of the people of Israel being God's sheep, and of God being their shepherd, ran deep. So when Jesus uses this image he is using a picture that will resonate deeply with them. And when we get it, it will with us as well.

Three-points: Doorway to Life; True Belonging; Real Pasture

Doorway to Life

Look at v7: 'So Jesus again said to them, "truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep." And then again in v9: "I am the door." Or in some translations, "I am the gate."

Now, when you go hiking, and you come across a gate in a field, have you ever noticed that it's never standing on its own in the middle of the field? 'Ooh, look at that lovely gate standing all on its own.' On either side of the gate is a wall or a fence. There's a barrier and the gate lets you through the barrier.

And so the thing about doors or gates is that there is something on either side of them, isn't there. A door stands between two different rooms. A gate stands between two different areas. And they're separated by a wall – and the door gives access to the area behind it that you couldn't get access to without it. So, what lies on the other side of Jesus that he claims to give access to?

Well, that depends on who you listen to, doesn't it? Sometimes you'll hear stuff that makes you think Jesus' sole purpose in life is to sprinkle fairy dust on your life, and be the icing on the top of your cake. And he doesn't demand anything of you, you can go on living the way you are – but now Jesus is there to bless you. Or, Jesus is the doorway for you to have a bit more balance in your life, a bit more

spirituality, to enable you to better connect with yourself and with God, at least God in the way you think of God to be.

But Jesus sees things differently. Verse 9: "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved."

So Jesus is saying that on one side of him, on the outside – is what it is to be unsaved, to be separated from God by this wall, to be in an unsafe situation with God, to face life now and in eternity without God. But on the other side of this dividing barrier, on the inside, is what it is to be saved, to know what it is to be safe in God's presence, to be reconciled to him, to know eternal security.

But Jesus doesn't leave it there. He expands on what he means by being saved, and it's not just pie in the sky when you die. Verse 10: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." So what does it mean to be saved and enter the sheepfold of God? It means to enjoy abundant life. An overflowing life. A life where you know the goodness and the love of God poured out for you; where you know peace with God and freedom from guilt and from fear, where you know a deep inner security and wellbeing that overflow; and not just in the next life, but in the here and the now.

Now, I don't know if you've ever had the experience of arriving at a building you've never been to before, maybe for a meeting or something, and you need to get in, but you can't find the entrance. And you wander around it this way and then that way; and you try this door, and that doesn't work, and then that one. And you keep going round, trying doors until you find the way in. But imagine if inside that building, rather than a dull meeting awaiting you, is the thing you most want in life – the thing above everything else you desire – and all you have to do is get access to get it. How would that drive your search for the doorway in?

Well, Jesus says that what you're looking for is abundant life. It's knowing that you belong, and it's having your deepest desires met.

True Belonging

Now, I'm sure you've heard of – maybe even experienced – FoMo: the 'fear of missing out.' This anxiety that others might be having a better time than you - that others are doing stuff, or having a great time – and you're not there. You're left out. You're missing out. And that anxiety, of course, is fuelled by social media.

But what lies at the root of that is what psychologists would say is a legitimate need for relatedness, for connectedness. That deep down we have been wired to belong, to be included, to be part of community and family, to not be missing out.

The problem is that if you satisfy this need for belonging in wrong ways, or if it's not satisfied at all, it will eat you up.

In 1944, CS Lewis gave the memorial Lecture at Kings College London, and he titled it *The Inner Ring*. If you haven't read it, one day you should. And in it he describes the phenomenon of the Inner Ring. That there's this desire to be in

among those who are *really* in, to be *in* with those we want to be in with: to belong to that inner ring – whatever that ring is for you. And once in, to keep out those who are not yet in. To be among the select few who know, or who experience what you experience or enjoy or do, because this is what sets you apart. And Lewis concludes by saying, 'The quest for the inner ring will break your hearts, unless you break it.' The need to belong – to some group of friends, or the upper echelons of management, or the in-crowd at work – will leave you at risk of compromise – of doing stuff you shouldn't do to get access to that group. And then, once in, you'll do stuff you shouldn't do to keep others out, because the joy of the inner ring is that it's special, it's exclusive.

But likewise, if you don't satisfy your need to belong somewhere, that will eat you up – because you'll always be looking and longing, but never belonging.

And into that desire to belong, Jesus says, "I am the door" – and it's through me that you can enter into real belonging, it's through me that you can come in and enter the only inner ring that matters – the sheepfold of God's people, and know that you are loved and cherished and belong to your heavenly Father; that you are a member of his family. And when you know the security of that belonging, it frees you to belong - or not - to these other rings; but being in or out of those rings doesn't eat you up.

But you can only enter that kind of belonging through Jesus. You see, think of all the ways we try and get access to the sheepfold of God's people, and get over this separation between us and God, and try and belong to him. We think that if we're the right kind of person: born in the right country, coming from the right background, he'll accept us; or if we live right, or are moral enough, or do enough good stuff, or fight the right social or political causes, we can somehow put God in our debt, and earn our membership, and he'll accept us and welcome us. That if I can just dress like a sheep, God will think I'm a sheep.

But Jesus sees things differently. He says he's the door. And it's through coming to him and through him that we can enter and enjoy this abundant life of belonging to God that we all seek.

But as well as offering you true belonging, Jesus also says he's the one who can satisfy your deepest desires.

Real Pasture

Look again at v9, where Jesus says, "I am the door. If anyone enters by me he will be saved *and will go in and out and find pasture*."

Now, have you ever asked yourself why a sheep feeds on grass? Head down, oblivious to anything else, chewing away? Because he or she's hungry. And so are we. Spiritually hungry. As Bruce Springsteen so succinctly put it in his song, "Everybody's got a hungry heart."

The question is how do you satisfy your hunger?

And each culture tells you that this is what you need to satisfy it, this is what you need to thrive – this is what you need to do, or to have, to find happiness and joy and fulfilment, this is the field you need to graze in if you are to satisfy your hungry heart. And in the West, currently, it's about being yourself, expressing your personal freedom, and throwing off the old rules, and pursuing pleasure - and if it feels good, do it.

And advertising feeds of this hunger for the abundant life, doesn't it? It tells you that you need this gadget, or this holiday, or this piece of clothing, or to lose this amount of weight, or to get ripped like this, to be happy; that this is the pasture you need to feed in if you are to feel good about life. And then you can be happy and satisfied – your heart can be full – just like all these other people who already have what you don't have.

And politics – or at least some politicians – will tell you that by voting for them they will enable you to have the future, the job, the security, the society that you're looking for, that you're hungry for, the pasture that you and your family can graze in and thrive in; so come join our flock, come into our pasture.

But what happens? Politicians fail to deliver – because they can never deliver what your heart is really hungry for; and the latest gadget, after a few weeks, becomes dull, and there's the next thing that you need; and getting ripped doesn't solve your problems, the reason why it mattered to you to get ripped in the first place. And expressing your personal freedom simply ends up with you enslaved to something else.

And so you discover that this pasture you're feeding in is not all it's cracked up to be. And so to everyone with a hungry heart, Jesus says, it's through me that you can go in and out and find real pasture. That it's in and through me that you can find the abundance of life that you're looking for. That it's in me that the deepest desires of your heart can be met. To paraphrase St Augustine – our hearts are hungry until they're satisfied by Christ. Our stomachs hurt until we feed on him.

And so Jesus says that he's the doorway to the fellowship and the food that our souls need to thrive.

But as we finish, notice that he says he's *the* door. Not *a* door. It's not that you can be saved, and belong to God's people and enjoy the limitless blessing of God by a thousand different doors and Jesus is just one of them. He says that in all this great wall that divides you, and all humanity, from God, he is the door. And it's only through Christ that you can gain access to that abundant life.

And in our day, that kind of exclusive talk does not sit easy, does it. We can accept a Jesus who says, 'hey, 'I'm just one way among many'; we can swallow that, but a Jesus who says, as he does in John 14:6 'I am *the* way, and the truth and the life. *No one* comes to the Father except through me' we choke on. But that is what he says – that he is the only way into the sheepfold of God's people, the only way to belong, the only way to this abundance of life.

Now, the reason we don't like such exclusive talk in is that in our age we have relativized truth. And there is no such thing as absolute moral truth. Which, of course, is self-contradictory. Because to state there is no absolute truth is itself to make a claim to absolute truth. And the fact is you and I live our lives dependant on absolute truth. I mean either there is, or there is not, enough petrol in the tank to get you home later. And either there is, or there is not, enough money in your bank to buy that thing you want to buy. And try telling your bank manager that you don't believe in absolute truth. No – you see, we only ever relativize feelings, not facts. And the problem is that today we have reduced faith to a feeling.

But when Jesus says he is the only way to be saved, the one doorway to salvation and abundant life, he is making a claim to fact.

So why does he say that? How can he say that? In what sense can he be the one doorway you need to walk through?

Well, listen to what the psalmist says in Psalm 118: 'This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.' (Ps 118:20-22). You see, the psalmist understands that to enter through the Lord's gate, to belong, to find pasture for your hungry heart, you have to be righteous.

And if you think about it, all the other ways we think we can gain access to God think the same: if I can be good enough, or spiritual enough, or work enough, and be the right kind of person, I'll find a way in or deserve his blessing.

But the psalmist links this access to the stone the builders rejected. And in the gospels Jesus says that refers to him. That when the religious leaders rejected him, and crucified him, they were rejecting the very one that God had chosen – the only one who could walk through the gate of righteousness.

But it was precisely through his death on the cross – as he took all our unrighteousness upon himself, so that we might be clothed with his righteousness, that you and I can walk through that gate. A cross-shaped gate. Because we don't put our trust in ourselves, but in him, the one way we can be counted righteous in God's sight, and enter into his presence, and his people, and his abundant blessing.