

**Sermon**  
**8 September 2013**  
**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

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**Text: John 10:1-15**

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Have you ever wondered what the most important part of a building is?

- The foundation is important, very important, because without a proper foundation a building could collapse easily.
- The windows are important, because without windows a building could be dark and stuffy.
- The roof is important, because without a roof, everything inside will be just as wet as everything outside when it rains – especially in this country!!
- But / think that the most important part of a building is the *door*. Because no matter how well the foundation is build, how many windows it has and how well the roof does its job – without a door, there will be no way to enter the building! And what use is a building if no-one can ever go inside?!

*Doors* play a very important role in our lives. A few minutes ago all of us walked through those church doors, and now we find ourselves in

a completely different place from the streets of West Calder/Polbeth – we are now in the house of God.

And just like that you enter your *house* through a door, your *work* through a door, the *shops* through a door, the *hospital* through a door, your *kitchen* through a door...

Just like doors literally play an important role in our lives, metaphorically we go through doors all the time too. When we start a new phase in our lives, like going to school, or getting married, or starting a career, or becoming parents/grandparents, we open a door to what lies ahead of us. Or when we walk out of an unhappy relationship or want to forget about something awful that happened to us, we need to shut that door behind us before we can really carry on with the rest of our lives.

But then, this morning we also heard about another door in our Scripture reading – about an entrance, a very special door/gate that every single Christian has to enter. In John 10:9 Jesus says: “I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.”

In our reading Jesus explains this metaphor by referring to a sheep pen.

Although there are lots of sheep in this country, and you can hardly go anywhere in West Lothian without passing some sheep alongside

the road, people took care of their sheep in a different manner in 1st century Palestine.

Let me explain:

The Israelites were poor people. Most of them had no money at all. They stayed alive by keeping sheep.

Sheep could be used for all kinds of things: they used the wool to make clothes with, they used the skin to make tents with, the horns were used either as vessels to store oil in or as musical instruments, the meat were eaten or traded for other necessities and in desperate times even the milk could be drunk.

If you keep this in mind, it doesn't come as a surprise that elsewhere in the New Testament we read that a shepherd will leave his 99 sheep to go find the 1 that wandered off – because every single *one* of them was important.

But it was one thing to own sheep, and a completely different story to keep them alive. Palestine was, and still is, a warm and dry land. Desert-like. Because of this, *shepherds* were seen as very important people, because they were the ones who made sure that the sheep they were responsible for had enough to eat and to drink, even if this meant travelling for days on end.

Because a shepherd spent long hours alone in the open with his sheep, they got to know each other very well, and there always developed a special bond between them.

If a shepherd was lucky enough to find food and water for his sheep close to a town, there usually was a sheep pen built alongside the inn.

This pen would have been built with stones, with no roof, and only 1 entrance. Usually thorny branches were placed on top of the walls, to keep thieves and wild animals out. The shepherd then slept at the gate of the pen, to make sure that his sheep were okay.

In the morning the shepherd would then enter the pen and call his sheep. And because they knew his voice so well, only his own sheep would get up and follow him, and the sheep of the other shepherds who spend the night there would patiently wait for the call of their own shepherd.

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Keeping all this in mind, it is very easy to see what Jesus meant in John 10.

We should understand John 10 against the background of John 9, where the Pharisees (the spiritual leaders of the time) accuse Jesus

that he doesn't come from God and the he is misleading and deceiving the people.

But Jesus set the record straight my means of this metaphor, using imagery that everybody in those days would be able to understand easily.

Everybody knew that a sheep pen had only 1 entrance. Jesus said that, just like that, He is the only entrance to God. Any person who wanted to become a member of God's family, where they would be safe and loved, and where they would always be taken care of and have enough to eat and to drink, where there would be safekeeping against all the wild animals of life, would have to enter through Jesus. Jesus was (and is) the only entrance to the family of God.

Anybody who tried to enter the kingdom of God in a different manner, was like a thief who tried to enter the pen by climbing over the wall. Such a person was not welcome there, and would get tangled up in the thorny branches. The Pharisees were like that, people who thought that they could get to God by means of obeying thousands of laws, and forcing other people to do the same too.

Now Jesus explained to them that they were making a mistake – just like in any other case where you want to enter a place, you can only get into the kingdom of God through the *door!* Through Jesus Christ.

Although this makes a lot of sense and is very easy to understand, the Pharisees didn't *want* to understand it, because that would mean that they would have to change. And they didn't want to.

Let's learn from their mistakes! Let's go in through the door – I mean, that's much easier than trying to sneak in somewhere else.

And to top it all – with Jesus' dying and rising again, he gave every single believer a key for this door – and this key is called "faith".

We don't have to decipher difficult codes or obey millions of rules or try to figure out how to become part of God's family all by ourselves – no. The only thing we have to do is to turn the key of faith, and then we will be inside.

The choice to enter, or not, is thus in our own hands. To use this key is such a wonderful, life changing opportunity, but still there are people who choose to not enter through this door – it happens. Quite a lot, actually. We see it every day.

The thing is – once you enter this door, there are certain things that you are not supposed to find on the inside, things like low moral standards, excessive drinking, gossiping, lying, cheating, undermining, disloyalty – I can go on and on, but I'm sure you are getting the picture.

But what these people forget, is that the things you *do* find inside this door, cannot be found anywhere else. Like *true* love, forgiveness, acceptance, respect, trust, support, patience...

Faith in Jesus Christ is our key to the kingdom of God. God wants us to use this key, because he loves us. Even more than a 1st century sheperd loved his sheep. He will make sure that we are always well tended and safe, as long as we recognise his voice and follow him wherever he goes.

Don't stand on the doorstep and wonder what to do – let's turn our keys, and enter. And then, once we are inside, let's make sure that we keep *our* doors open to this broken world. Let's invite in those people who are tired of life, to come rest with us; those people who have had just too many doors shut in their faces, come see that no bad experience can be bigger than God; and let's go grab those people who are hiding behind closed doors because they are scared of getting hurt or dissapointed by the hand and let them share in the love of God.

Let's keep our doors open to this dark world, so that the light of the love of God can invite passers by in. And let's do that because Jesus became the door to a place that changes us forever. Nobody who enters through *this* door will ever be the same again, because such a person has the light of God in him/her.

And *nothing* that happens can ever turn this light of.

So let's turn our keys, go in, shut the door behind us, and leave our old lives behind, and then experience how *amazing* life can be... Life as a member of the family of God.

Amen