



St Marylebone
Parish Church

11am Holy Eucharist Easter 4
The Chaplain's House, Marylebone

Readings:

The Acts of the Apostles 2.42-end

The Holy Gospel according to St John 10.1-10

'I am the gate' says Jesus.

So, Jesus is the gate.

Well, then, what am I? Who am I?

In the face of such directness, it's natural for us to look at ourselves and ask – well **if He is that, what/who am I?**

Not only do I have different answers from you, some overlapping, some totally different, but I also have lots of different answers *within* myself. In some settings my primary answer is – 'son' or 'brother' or 'priest' or 'Londoner' or 'glutton' or 'athlete' or 'yoga instructor' – ok, the last two are flat out lies... but you get my point.

So what about (as has happened to many of us recently) when those '*I am*'s' have been taken away, or at least might feel like they've been hidden away. And perhaps some new ones have been given to us – 'I am' *mother* and *businesswoman* and *school teacher* and *cleaner* and *nurse* and *UN Peacekeeper between teenagers* all at once.

Identity is a strange and complex thing. The wisdom of our Christian tradition, and our Hebrew heritage have much to teach us about the complexities of the human condition, and the mystery of being a person.

But amongst all that, all that jumble of mystery and negotiation of identity: given, sought and taken away. This morning, Jesus speaks simply. Not simplistically, but simply and clearly.

He is the gate for the sheep. And in this picture, we, then are one of His sheep.

We are just *that*, one of Jesus' little ones.

T S Eliot writes truthfully and profoundly of a 'condition of complete simplicity (costing not less than everything)' (Little Gidding).

'I am the gate for the sheep' (St John 10.7). We are the sheep.

In the Acts of the Apostles we hear from St Luke of the early days of the Church after Jesus Ascension and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It's a rip-roaring tale of disaster and miracle, arguments and brotherly love. Today's section is particularly heart-warming, but no less striking and demanding for it:

'They devoted themselves' to prayer, fellowship, Eucharist, charity, common life, gladness and generosity, and the joyful salvation of all.

Whether the Church ever truly attained the gleam of this image – it's slightly hard to believe considering just how stupid and argumentative the Apostles' track record had been. Either way, **it is the image of how WE should be now**: in our churches and communities and homes and work places. Imagine how powerful and wonderful that would be!

And it is ultimately a simple image. It springs, not from the strivings of clever men, not from the search for power or influence, not from the manipulation of people and markets.

It springs from people knowing, that despite all their other 'I am *this*' and 'I am *that's*' amongst all our wranglings and identities: the only one that matters is to be one of Jesus' little ones. I am. Who are you? **I am one of Jesus' little ones.**

To say this and only this, above all else, 'I am one of Jesus' little ones' is to be not to be less, it is to be much much more than we can ever say elsewhere. It is the doorway – the gateway through which *everything* else comes. 'Who am I?' a tiny and terrifying question. What might it mean to truly live the answer: 'I am one of Jesus' little ones'?