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May 3, 2020

An Enigma in a Mystery

The Gospel of Mark states that Jesus said “everything in parable and never taught anything without being in a parable”. The Gospel of John contains not one single parable, but is instead the only source of Jesus’ much-loved “I AM” sayings. While we are quick to remember that the phrase “I Am” harkens back to the intimate Name for God YHWH, Moses received at the Burning Bush; John identifies that Jesus’ “I AM” sayings made no more sense to people than his Parables. While some wanted to appear as though they understood his wisdom or that speaking mystically was evidence of something going on, most who heard these sayings thought him insane and wanted to throttle him, screaming “What is with Poetry? Can you not speak plainly and directly, instead of talking around things?” But that was Jesus’ style.

While the facts of the Resurrection are fundamental to who Jesus is (The one who was welcomed to Jerusalem as a Messiah by crowds shouting “Hosanna”, was then betrayed, abandoned, crucified, dead and buried, who rose again. To this all the Gospels and Letters agree.) each Gospel is arranged distinctly, to emphasize each writers’ own circumstance and concerns about God, Jesus, truth, life, death and love. As named in every one of the resurrection appearances, the disciples later remembered what he had said earlier. The Gospels, and for that matter the Bible, and our Lives as a whole, are not only to be interpreted chronologically. Like a great mystery, “who-done-it, when and how” are all revealed to the reader before we begin. The point of our having four Gospels is Why and our reconsideration of every: Parable, healing, I Am saying and story, through the perspective of Jesus’ Resurrection, and therefore of his being not only a Rabbi, a Prophet, A Messiah, but THE Son of God.

Remember back 6 weeks ago to Pastor Diane’s sermon, our first on Video, recorded in the Spiritual Life Center, just after the Patio Sale in March, in the middle of Lent, about “a Man born Blind”; who made the Disciples question whether he sinned or his parents had sinned to cause him to be blind; whom Jesus gave sight; and that before and after this morning’s “I AM” sayings, Jesus was accused of blasphemy, not because he healed a blindman, but because Jesus claimed to have the power of YHWH.

In the story of giving sight to the blind, the man was brought before the Pharisees, where his family abandoned him, then the man professed “Never before in the history of the world has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” For this, the community cast him out, cut him off as Lost, a Sinner. AND Jesus sought him out. Overhearing Jesus’ blessing of this man they had condemned, the Pharisees questioned: “Are we blind?” To which Jesus had said, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but saying, “We see, guilt remains.”

At which point, Jesus quotes this Proverb: “Whoever does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in another way, is a thief and robber. He who enters by the door is a Shepherd.” Jesus identifies himself as being A Shepherd. Understand Israel was a Caste system. Pharisees were born to be educated Teachers and Leaders, Saducees to be Lawyers. Scribes were researchers trusted with the Torah, who copied letter by letter, dot by dot what the Law of Moses said. A Rabbi was Teacher over Disciples, a

person of education, learning and mysticism. A Carpenter was a Craftsman but not an educated person, not even a person of faith. A Shepherd was a nomad, a hired hand who lived outside the community. So Jesus, the Carpenter's son was claiming the wisdom and respect of being a Rabbi? How presumptuous!

But then he was claiming to be a Shepherd? He might as well have identified himself as being a Servant. But then he identified all Pharisees and Rabbis as Thieves! To which Jesus said "I AM the Door!" Then he says: "I AM the Good Shepherd." You can almost hear the wheels in people's minds working. "You are a Door?" You are The Good Shepherd?" But you just said you were not a Carpenter but a Shepherd. King David was remembered as being The Shepherd of Israel, are you claiming to be greater than David? The most attentive would have said, but Jesus also said "I AM" so is he claiming to have come from God?

For the last 7 weeks all our world has been Gated in Sheepfolds. SO Jesus is our Protection. When I wanted the church to have a Youth Group, the Christian Educator and I invited the Jr & Sr Highs of our Church to invite their friends to the Church for a Sleep-Over. What we had not anticipated was that 300 kids showed up. We painted classrooms, sorted food, played games and watched a movie. When time for sleep came, we wanted to be certain the girls stayed together and the boys in a separate room, so I instructed the Christian Educator to lay across the doorway of the girls room, while I lay across the doorway of the boys, becoming the Door. In the middle of the night, I awoke, and shining a flashlight around, discovered the boys attempting to swing from the rafters to jump over me sleeping as the Door.

At one point, we had a neighboring church leaving the denomination and I was invited to their Session meeting. They began with a Bible Study of this passage about the Sheepgate. The interpretation was that the Gate is narrow, laws of righteousness are strict, and the role of the church, particularly the Session was to make certain only the worthy get in. I suggested that this could be true, but another interpretation might be that our role as The Church, particularly as leaders might be for us to extend the gate wider using our own bodies and lives and relationships to include and bring others in.

In Seminary, would-be ministers are taught the Biblical images of God as Prophet, Priest and King. There are ministers who pattern themselves to be treated as a Priest, representing God to the world; there are those who expect to be treated as a King; there are those who believe our words of wisdom in sermons are pearls of Prophecy. Personally, I have always liked Pastoral images of Shepherd or Cattleherd. Different from Prophet, Priest or King, a Shepherd lives with their flock, experiencing life, sharing their tears and fears, hopes and dreams. A shepherd sits on a hillside watching over the flock, planning when to take them to good pasture, watching for a wolf, submersing each frightened sheep in a trough of antiseptic to protect them from parasites. A Herdsman is down in the midst of the herd wherever they go. What frustrates me most during this time, is that as Pastors we are not permitted to visit in hospitals or Assisted Care, where we want to be. We know there are people we have prayed with and cared for, who now are infected, who could die, we know everyone is frustrated and tired and afraid, and all we are permitted. is to love, to pray, and to stand in witness that we are your shepherds who care.

In 2003, the teens in our community were having what they called "Field-parties". On Fathers' Day morning, the siren went off, that a 16 year old from our church had taken his father's Ferarri and after this party, drunk, he and two friends had driven into town at 110 mph. After the crash, one friend since birth was dead, another was quadriplegic, and the boy from our church who had taken his father's car was arrested. When the day came for his arraignment, and later for his trial and sentencing for Manslaughter, as his pastor I accompanied him. The news cameras could not get a good image of the boy because I had placed myself protecting him from them. For the next six months, regularly on the

morning and nightly news, was my profile walking beside an unseen person as the reporters described his crime. We visited him in Federal prison for the next five years. After his sentence was over and he was on parole, we described that his sentence had been served, but redemption is about more than time and punishment. We worked to care for him and help him earn a place in the community. Today I can share that he earned his degree as an Architect, and has gotten engaged to be married.

One of my mentors had been a Missionary in Israel. He described that out of fear, Israel has lived under government restrictions. My professor described that one afternoon, there was a knock at the door of their house, and three students from America asked if they could pitch a tent in his yard for the night. The Professor said, "Yes, but you have to get a Permit from the Police to do so." They returned with the Permit and pitched their tent. The next morning the campers were gone. A few hours later, the Police arrested him and took him to Jail awaiting trial. The Professor asked what he had done wrong, and was told there were to have been two Permits, one granting permission to Camp overnight, another with permission that they leave as the area was as they found it. He spent a week in Jail waiting for trial the next Monday. Late in the week, a local Pastor of a different Church came to the Jail to visit him, stating that he wanted the Professor to come to Worship on Sunday. On Sunday, the Professor was in worship, when the Pastor called him forward, describing this shepherd of students as being a lost sheep in need. Afterward, the Professor thanked the Pastor asking that the next day he be allowed to go alone to Trial as he had been the one who had made the mistake. The Pastor was indignant, that if they allowed this they would not be following their responsibility. As the Professor walked down the aisle of the church, eight burly men stood up and surrounded him marching in lock-step as one. They marched him down the aisle, out of the church, down the mainstreet of the town to where an immense outdoor banquet was prepared, overflowing with food and drink, that everyone would see and know that this man was not a stranger, was not alone, but what happened to him was within the fold of the flock.