

### *John 10:7-10 (NRSV)*

<sup>7</sup>So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.  
<sup>8</sup>All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them.  
<sup>9</sup>I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.  
<sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

### *John 12:1-3 (CEB)*

Six days before Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, home of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.<sup>2</sup> Lazarus and his sisters hosted a dinner for him. Martha served and Lazarus was among those who joined him at the table.<sup>3</sup> Then Mary took an extraordinary amount, almost three-quarters of a pound, of very expensive perfume made of pure nard. She anointed Jesus’ feet with it, then wiped his feet dry with her hair. The house was filled with the aroma of the perfume.

### *Romans 12:1-2 (CEB)*

So, brothers and sisters, because of God’s mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service.<sup>2</sup> Don’t be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God’s will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.

*Transformation is the key to it all.*

Jesus knew Lazarus and his family about as well as he knew anyone. Though they lived in Bethany, a couple of miles east of Jerusalem, Jesus tried to see them when he could. Jesus remembered the time he had triggered an argument between Lazarus’s sisters when he had let Mary sit at his feet to listen and to learn, just as he would a male disciple. Overworked Martha had been none too happy about it (Luke 10:38-42).

At the time, who could have seen what would come? Lazarus had fallen desperately ill and died, leaving the sisters awash in grief and fear, though they had sent for Jesus. When he finally arrived, Martha had even taken him to task for not arriving sooner, for both of them trusted that Jesus could have saved Lazarus if he had been there. But Jesus had his reasons for the delay, which became clear when Jesus went to the tomb, prayed, and called for Lazarus to come out. Despite being dead for four days, Lazarus stumbled out of the tomb, alive . . . see and believe (John 11:1-44).<sup>1</sup>

Not surprisingly, as word spread and everyone saw Lazarus alive and well, the Jewish leadership redoubled their resolve to get rid of Jesus (John 11:45-57). Nonetheless, Jesus returned to Bethany only six days before the Festival of Passover. It would be Jesus’ last visit to Bethany. Lazarus probably sensed what was coming; perhaps it was evident to all. So Lazarus threw a party. Martha served (of course). But Mary . . . set herself apart again.

In the midst of dinner, Mary entered the room and came to where Jesus reclined at tableside.<sup>2</sup> She knelt down and poured a large quantity of pure nard on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. It is important to grasp the value of what she poured on Jesus’ feet:

---

<sup>1</sup> It is vitally important to grasp that Lazarus is not resurrected, he is resuscitated. Jesus’ brings Lazarus back to life but he will still grow old and die . . . again. It is as if Lazarus was brought back to life on an operating table. Only Jesus has been resurrected; i.e., passed through death to a newly embodied life, never to die again.

<sup>2</sup> Diners would recline around a low, long table with their feet pointing outwards, giving Mary access to Jesus’ feet. People did not sit in chairs with the legs under the table, as we do now.

The quantity of perfume is considerable, a *litra*, a measurement of weight . . . approximately eleven ounces. *Nard* is an oil extracted from the root and spike of the nard plant, grown in India. It is modified by the adjective *pistikēs*, whose meaning is disputed. . . . More likely it derives from *pistos* ('faithful' or 'genuine'), hence NIV's *pure nard*. Its purity, quantity and origin account for its appalling cost: when John labels it *an expensive perfume*, he is thinking on a scale far larger than what we might mean by the words.<sup>3</sup>

Something like this had happened before. Once, at the home of a Pharisee (of all places), Jesus had been approached by a woman he had never met. Though known by all as a sinner, the woman had stood behind Jesus weeping, and then, ever so slowly, she had bent down and kissed Jesus' feet, wiping them with her hair. She then poured some perfumed oil on Jesus' feet. This had created quite a scene in the Pharisee's home, as all the Pharisees were aghast that Jesus would allow her, this sinner, to do such a thing. But Jesus knew that the depth of her sin had enabled her to gratefully receive the gift of God's grace and love. Jesus had forgiven her sins and sent her on her way (Luke 7:36-50).

But this time was different. Jesus had known Mary and her family for his whole life. The "immoral" woman at the Pharisee's home knew she had been brought from the deepest darkness into the light of Christ and she was transformed.

But Mary? There had been no blinding moment of transformation for her. Had she even known that she needed to be transformed? Yet, she had been. And now, more than anything, she wanted to demonstrate her love for and her devotion to Jesus. So she had taken one of the few family treasures and poured it out on Jesus . . . anointing him for burial. She too knew that the confrontations were coming to a head. But on that evening, she wanted Jesus to know that, in him, she had come to a truly abundant life.

*"I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly."*

In John's Gospel, not long before the resuscitation of Lazarus and Mary's anointing of Jesus, John tells us that Jesus is embroiled in another debate with some Pharisees, whom he has accused of blindness when it comes to the ways of God. And he turns to images of sheep and shepherds, familiar subjects in all of Judea and Galilee.

Throughout the ancient Near East, including Israel, the shepherd was a metaphor for the kings and their responsibilities to guide, protect, and care for their people. And Israel's kings, particularly in the northern kingdom of Israel, had failed miserably. Their kings may have failed them, but God would not. Ezekiel says it will work like this: God will take over the shepherding of God's people. And how will God shepherd his people? "I will set up over them one shepherd," from David's royal line, bringing us to Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

So Jesus claims that he is the fulfillment of that promise. He is the shepherd, the one who leads the flock in through the gate. But Jesus is not only the one who enters through the gate, leading the flock into the safety of the pen, Jesus is the very gate itself. "Very truly, I tell you," he says, "I am the gate for the sheep. . . . I am the gate" (Luke 10:7 & 9). He and no other is the way into the safety of the pen (v. 9a) and out to the luxurious forage of the pasture (9b). Jesus holds nothing back: "Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture." The world is filled with many who want to steal and to kill and to destroy. But Jesus is the gateway to eternal life, abundant life . . . life that can be given by no one else.

---

<sup>3</sup> Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 428). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans. I've simplified Dr. Carson's text a bit.

<sup>4</sup> Jesus' claim to be of David's royal line is through Joseph, not Mary, as established in Matthew's genealogy (Ch. 1). Jesus' claim is as valid as if he carried Joseph's DNA. Our system works the same. An adopted child gets a new birth certificate with the names of the adoptive parents.

We marvel at the tapestry of powerful images that Jesus weaves together as he pushes us to confront and then to answer these questions: Do we trust that Jesus is who he claims to be? Do we trust that Jesus is the gateway to the abundant and eternal life? Mary's answer is a clear, "Yes! Yes!"

### *Transformation*

Mary and countless others, including the unnamed woman in Luke 7, have been transformed, discovering the life that is possible only in Jesus. The abundant life, the transformed life. Read again Romans 12:1-2 on page one. This transformation is the key to everything, as N. T. Wright writes:<sup>5</sup>

The key to it all is the transforming of the *mind*. Many Christians in today's world never come to terms with this. They hope they will be able to live up to something like Christian standards while still thinking the way the rest of the world thinks. It can't be done. Paul's analysis of human rebellion against God in 1:18–32 included a fair amount of wrong *thinking*. Having the mind renewed by the persuasion of the spirit is the vital start of that true human living which is God's loving will for all his children.

This, after all, is a way of growing up to maturity. People sometimes suggest that living a Christian life means a kind of immaturity, since you are guided not by thinking things through for yourself but by rules and regulations derived from elsewhere. That isn't Paul's vision of Christian living. Of course there are plenty of firm boundaries. He will have more to say about them presently. But at the centre of genuine Christianity is a mind awake, alert, not content to take a few guidelines off the peg but determined to understand *why* human life is meant to be lived in one way rather than another. . . .

For Paul, the mind and the body are closely interconnected, and must work as a coherent team. Having one's mind renewed and offering God one's body (verse 1) are all part of the same complete event. Here Paul uses a vivid, indeed shocking, idea: one's whole self (that's what Paul means by 'body') must be laid on the altar like a sacrifice in the Temple. The big difference is that, whereas the sacrifice is there to be killed, the Christian's self-offering is actually all about coming alive with the new life that bursts out in unexpected ways once the evil deeds of the self are put to death. . . . Christian living never begins with a set of rules, though it contains them as it goes forwards. It begins in the glad self-offering of one's whole self to the God whose mercy has come all the way to meet us in our rebellion, sin and death. Within that, it involves the renewal of the mind so that we are enabled both to think straight, instead of the twisted thinking that the world would force upon us, and to act accordingly.

And so this self-offering of our whole selves is seen in all that we do and say, including the generous gifts that go directly to God's work at St. Andrew and elsewhere. Such extravagant generosity springs from our transformation into genuinely committed disciples of Jesus. We hold nothing back. Instead, with joy we put to work what God has entrusted to us. As Paul put it, may our sacrifices be holy and pleasing to God!

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. "I am the gate for the sheep." The third of Jesus' seven well-known "I am . . ." statements. Where does safety lie? Through the gate called Jesus. How can we find the abundant life, the green pastures, we so desire? Through the gate called Jesus. It is he who has come that we might have life and have it abundantly (10:10). Jesus doesn't dance around the question. There is only one gateway into the presence of God and that is Jesus himself. This foreshadows a later statement of Jesus: "I am

---

<sup>5</sup> Wright, T. (2004). *Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part 2: Chapters 9-16* (pp. 69–71). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (14:1). There is only one gate into the kingdom: Jesus.

2. We’ve talked a good bit of late about transformation and we’ve acknowledged that it begins with God. But do you see the need, in yourself, to be transformed? What is our part in this cooperative effort? What are our responsibilities in this transformation? How well do you think you are doing?

## Daily Bible Readings

**This week:** *More on sheep and transformation*

**Monday, Ezekiel 34** The Lord will be Israel’s shepherd

**Tuesday, Psalm 23** The Lord is our shepherd

**Wednesday, Luke 10** The gate and the shepherd

**Thursday, Luke 11** The resuscitation of Lazarus

**Friday, Luke 19:1-10** A tax collector named Zacchaeus is transformed

**Saturday, Luke 7:36-50** A sinful woman pours perfume on Jesus’ head

## Scott Engle’s Bible Classes

### Monday Evening Class

We are studying the gospel of John.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

### Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of Samuel.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

*About the weekday classes:*

Join us whenever you can. Each week’s lesson stands on its own. This is very “drop-in.” Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) to make sure the class is meeting.

### Scott’s 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

November 12: “Old Testament Turning Points”