Hi,

Happy Friday. Today’s updates:

* This Sunday in my 11am class we will be continuing the series, *Living Hope*, for I know we could all use some more hope in these very difficult times. I hope you will join us [on my Facebook page for ministry](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* My 3pm Monday class on Matthew and my noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet next week, both on [my Facebook ministry page](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.
* Don’t forget to [vote for your favorite hymn here](https://www.jotform.com/202296152204042?fbclid=IwAR3PCQD_EW-ScuozGaeQjsT5lUgiu0OGCOfSIa1Sln7cYupvzgqvqOxhsXU).
* The Weekly Bible Study for this weekend is attached.

Both today and on Monday, we’ll be in chapter 10 of John’s gospel, wherein all of the imagery and metaphor is based on sheep and shepherds. Jesus is both the “gate for the sheep’ and the “good shepherd.” What does he mean?

***Ezekiel 34:2-4, 9-16 (NRSV)***

**Thus says the Lord God: Ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them. . . . therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: Thus says the Lord God, I am against the shepherds; and I will demand my sheep at their hand, and put a stop to their feeding the sheep; no longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, so that they may not be food for them.**

**For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.**

***John 10:1-10 (NRSV)***

**“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.**

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

Sheepherding isn’t a subject about which most of us know much. I actually spent a couple of summers in college working the Wyoming range helping to look for uranium deposits. I would occasionally come across very large flocks of sheep and their Basque sheepherders, all of whom lived in small, horse-drawn wagons as they guided their sheep. These wiry, leathered men were the sheep’s only protection from starvation and attack. The same was true in the ancient near east.

It isn’t very hard for us to see the basics of the imagery into which Jesus leads us in chapter 10. He is the “gate for the sheep” and the “good shepherd.” We can easily connect with images of caring, guiding, and protecting, but there is much more to these shepherding images.

By far, the most important Old Testament backdrop for Jesus’ “I am” statements in John 10 comes from the mouth of Ezekiel, the prophet of Israel who lived more than 600 years before Jesus. Ezekiel 34 is a sharp attack on the many kings of Israel and Judah, the “shepherds of Israel.” The kings were generally a bad lot, who failed miserably at their task of caring for, guiding, and protecting their sheep, the Israelites, the people of God. With only a few exceptions, they are recorded in the book of Kings as doing “what was evil in God’s sight.” 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 had failed miserably.

You might take a few minutes and the read the above passage from Ezekiel 34 and even the entire chapter. You’ll see that although it is a starkly drawn indictment of Israel’s kings, it is also a deeply moving portrait of a God who loves deeply and will take care of his people. Their kings may have failed them, but God will not. God will take over the shepherding of God’s people: “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep . . . I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak . . .” (from v. 15-16).

And how will God shepherd his people? “I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them: I the Lord, have spoken” (v. 23-24).

Since David, the second king of the united Israel, had died centuries before Ezekiel, he cannot be who God has in mind as the servant who will shepherd God’s people. Rather, this shepherd will come from David’s royal line, bringing us to Jesus.

*“I am the gate for the sheep”*

Keeping always in mind the bad shepherds of Israel and God’s promise to raise up a shepherd himself, Jesus claims that he is the fulfillment of that promise. He is the shepherd, the one who leads the flock in the through the gate, echoing Psalm 118: “Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it” (v. 18-19). But Jesus is not only the one who enters the through the gate, leading the flock into the safety of the pen, Jesus is the very gate itself . . . “the gate of the Lord.”

“Very truly, I tell you,” he says, “I am the gate for the sheep. . . . I am the gate” (v. 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.

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 believe? Do we trust that Jesus is who he claims to be? Do we trust that Jesus is the gateway to safety, to nourishment . . . to eternal life?

The gospel of John revolves around these questions. So many versions of Jesus float around in our world. So many “experts” claim to have at last discovered the real truth, which we’ll learn only if we watch the latest Easter-time TV special. We get the Gnostic Jesus of the gospel of Judas, the husband and father of the *Da Vinci Code,* the wandering sage filled with witty aphorisms of the Jesus Seminar, and more. No matter what sort of Jesus you are looking for, you can find it if you just have enough imagination.

But the Gospel of John reminds us that there is only one Jesus . . . and he still lives. He is *the bread of life* and *the light to the world* and *the gate for the sheep* . . . and more. We ought not be about the business of creating a Jesus who suits us, but, rather, coming to know the Jesus revealed to us in Scripture and testified to by the fellowship of believers. It is this Jesus who leads us to the cross and onward to resurrection and life everlasting.

‘til Monday, grace and peace,

Scott