



**May 7, 2017**  
**Fourth Sunday of Easter**

*"I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture."  
John 10:9*

Dear Friends;

Christ is risen!

I have a couple of friends who think that because I live in Byron I should have more farm animals beside the chickens. They decided that I need a goat. So every once in a while, they ask when am I going to get a goat. The other day one of those friends was walking and took some pictures of goats grazing on one of the open fields of Brentwood. She texted the photos and asked me which goat she should bring over to my house. I texted her back "Ha-ha, I can't have a goat because I don't have a gate!"

Nowadays people are renting goats to clear the brush and weeds in fields and hillsides. This is a very ecologically conscious way of reducing fire hazard. Goats, like sheep, are herd animals. Goatherds, their dogs and the goats bond with each other. The goats need the protection of the goatherd and a dog. On a website called We-Rent-Goats they said the dog only barks for three reasons: the goat won't go where the dog is directing her, a predator got in the fenced in area, or a person the dog and goats don't know got near.

Jesus uses a familiar image, of sheep and shepherds, to speak about his mission. Shepherds and goatherds bonded with their animals. They led them to pasture during the day. And at night to protect the animals, they led them to a corral. A corral was usually a circular low rock wall with one opening. The shepherds or goatherds would lie across the one opening so as to keep the animals in and the predators out. They were literally the gate.

In Israel the traditional image of the shepherd was honorable. God was called Shepherd of Israel. The king and the priests were referred to as shepherds. But by the time of Jesus the profession of shepherd was looked down upon. Shepherds were ritually unclean—because they were dirty; or as Pope Francis said "They smell like the sheep." Yet, ironically Jesus uses the image of the shepherd, whose very body is a protecting gate. He stands between the sheep and any predator that would harm the sheep.

Jesus stands in contrast to those self-proclaimed shepherds who will not let themselves get dirty. They only prey upon the flock. This part of the gospel comes after Jesus calls the leaders blind. They had thrown out the man who had been blind from birth because Jesus healed him on the Sabbath. They were gates that were always shut. They were more about keeping others out than letting them in. They were more interested in protecting their positions and their rules than protecting the flock. It was all about them and not the sheep.

As followers of the Good Shepherd we are called to shepherd others with the love and mercy that we have received. We must open the gates to all who seek life, nourishment, love, healing, forgiveness and safe haven. Whoever they are, we welcome them and offer them protection. We bond with them and together listen for the voice of our life-giving Shepherd. Like him we lay down our lives for the sake of love.

Peace,

*Fr. Ron*

*Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: [www.stannechurchbyron.com](http://www.stannechurchbyron.com)*