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“Jesus as the Gate” The Rev. Kara Leslie (4/30/2023, Fourth Sunday of Easter)
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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable unto You, O Lord. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we pray, amen. You may be seated. Good morning, Easter people of God. Good morning, four weeks ago, we celebrated the empty tomb. And the next Sunday, we heard the story of Thomas Doubting Thomas, who could not imagine that Jesus came back. And the words that Jesus gave were Peace be with you. And then last week, we heard the story of the walk to Emmaus, where the people gather with Jesus, and they're walking, Jesus is telling story after story after story. And then they break bread, and they realize that was Jesus. And today, the fourth Sunday of Easter, we hear the story of Jesus as the gate to abundant life. All our readings today reveal to us how Christ is made fully known to us, and brought into our lives and acts, we have the followers of Jesus, and they gather and they're praying together, and they're sharing and meals together. They share all the financial responsibilities, and they make sure everyone is taken care of, because they are followers of Christ. And then our Psalm, one of the ones that most of us know, and if you don't, you've heard it. It begins my The Lord is my shepherd. Oh, y'all are awake, good, good. I shall not want. And today, the Coverdale the version that we had in our bulletin, it offers different insights. So I hope that you'll take your bulletin home with you and just look at a different way of hearing the Lord's, the shepherd psalm of 23. And then our gospel reading today is Jesus is the gatekeeper. He tells this story and taking that continues that theme of sheep and shepherd into this reading from John. And Jesus tells us convoluted story, and they didn't get it. And it's really hard to understand. So then Jesus has to simplify it. And he says, I am the gatekeeper for the sheep, come through the gate and be fed, and have life abundantly. Now, I teased Eugene and said, Well, I could just stop there. And he would say, that's great. I love short sermons. Do you hear me? He loves short sermons. But then I feel like y'all might not think you got well, you got all you needed out of church. So today, I'm going to look at three little phrases in that gospel texts that are bothersome. Now we could ignore them. But I truthfully think they're an invitation. They're an invitation for us to look deeper into this passage. So let's take it

first, we are warned not to climb over the fence or to go in by any other way. Almost every one of us here have climbed a fence. Maybe not yesterday, maybe not in the last 50 years, or maybe more. But nonetheless, we've probably have climbed a fence. He was tall, maybe it was short, maybe you were trying to get away from someone, or trying to prove how athletic you are. Or maybe it was just something to do. But most every human being has climbed a fence. But Jesus tells us not to climb the fence. And we choose to not go through the gate. Second, Jesus is very clear that there have been others before him, who've come to try to get people to follow them, to tell them about the way to God to offer that pathway to right relationship with God. And Jesus warns us that those are thieves and robbers. And finally, we hear how these thieves and bandits come to kill and destroy. Those are three little phrases that are part of our gospel reading today. And they're hard. But they're also an invitation. Because why does Jesus include them in this reading? Now we could think well, okay, Jesus did it because he's trying to point out the bad guys, the bad people, the ones over there who do the wrong. But I want us to think about it in a different way. Could we ourselves, be the robbers? Can we ourselves be the ones that cheat ourselves out of a relationship with a God that loves us who anoint us every day with grace, who has overflowing mercy in our lives, who seeks to heal us? In every broken place of our life, could we be the ones who cheat ourselves out of that relationship? brother and a sister had gone to their mother's home, she died about seven months ago. And it's hard to go there. There's so much to do. So many memories and stories and pictures. But it is getting close to time for them to clean the house out and to be paired to sell the house, this woman had seven children, a group of five, with a set of triplets with rhyming names, first name and middle name. And I have permission to tell this story. So she has five kids in this beginning group. And then she has to in the very, after a couple of years, more more than a couple of years. And so these younger two are the ones who are given the task, the responsibility, have the ability to go through the home and prepare it. And as they go through this house, the memories are coming. And they decide after they've looked and close the house up to go out to eat and share a meal. So they can laugh together as long and cry together. So they're sitting down at the restaurant and the waitress comes up and she says What would you like to drink. And they kind of finish the conversation about their mother who's died. And the waitress who's 20 says, Well, my mother died three years ago, when I was 17. At a scholarship, I was a senior in high school, had a full scholarship. And I just couldn't go to school. I just couldn't do it. And here I am. The brother and the sister said, or could have said, Well, I hope that scholarships still there, or you know, it's time to move on. It's been three years, you better get on with your life. But they didn't. They said your soul is crushed. They let her be where she is in her grief. They honored her grief and her lostness your soul is crushed. Sometimes that is the beginning of the journey for someone outside to recognize your pain, and how lost you are in life. You know, we're good at telling ourselves to get it

together, it'll be better than maybe just maybe you'll have it well together enough to go through the gate. We try to cheat ourselves out of that grace that God so freely offers. We also try to do it by ourselves. We are such an independent society. It's infectious. Do it on your own, we can do it by ourselves. And if we can't we get frustrated. We don't understand why our bodies won't work by themselves. Why we can't do anything by ourselves. And this becomes especially true the older you get. And so this woman, young, divorce, depressed, unemployed, and scared. She's afraid to ask for help with her crying. But she goes to the doctor. And she says I cry every day. And the doctor says, Well, maybe would you be willing to try an antidepressant? It could really help you feel better. So six weeks later, she comes back to the doctor. The doctor says how do you feel? Why do I feel better? Could I have could we increase the dosage? Because originally it was given very low? Could we increase the dosage so I could have more relief? Is it wrong for me to want to have a little joy in my life? For some people antidepressants raise that floor so they can function and have a better life. She was so worn down by everything that she had been through that she needed some help. You remember, the sheep need a shepherd. Remember, the sheep need a pasture, the sheep need to be called by name. They need to be known. We want to be so independent that sometimes we rob ourselves of the most meaningful relationship with our Savior. Jesus is the gatekeeper, and we need him and he needs us. Perhaps the worst way that we rob ourselves of a relationship is by believing that we are not lovable. That How could God love us that much? I mean, look, our lives are a mess. How would God Why would God want to love us, okay, love us, but love us that much. Now, remember, God longed to be with us. So he came to be with us as one of us, to walk with us, to break bread with us, to be with us and to redeem us. When we're lost, in running after false gods are on that rat wheel of life, and our lives are isolated, and we feel scorned and shamed and forgotten. However, you would describe your life at its worst. God comes to love you in that moment. And in every way you can imagine and more. Answer this question. Why are you not lovable? Do you have a list? One or two things? Maybe that answer this question. Why are you lovable? Because you're a child of God, because you are a child of God. Christ comes to open the gate, Christ comes to set us free and His grace, to forgive us of our sins, and to love us completely. I said this was an invitation to look at these hard places about thieves and robbers and destroying kill. Because sometimes we are the ones that do that to our own selves. And we're the ones that do that to the relationship that God has so freely placed before us. So are you trying to con yourself out of that relationship with God who calls you by name? I want to encourage you, to not rob yourself of that, to not rob yourself, because you feel condemned but to trust that Jesus came to save us, to save us to lead us in those paths of righteousness, to fill our cups till they runneth over. And to bless us with that goodness and mercy that will follow us all the days of our lives, and that we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.