

Lent Day 19

Wednesday March 7, 2018

Reading: John 10:1-21

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture.

Reflection

In our History of Christianity II course at Northview we have been reading John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. This is an allegorical story of a man who comes to realize that he and his whole city are scheduled for destruction because they live under the wrath of God. With this new knowledge the man begins to mourn, to repent (he understands both the wrath and coming destruction are justified), and to find a way to avoid this terrible future. So, he engages his family and friends in conversation, reads scripture, weeps, walks and prays. Then one day another man comes on him who directs him to the course of salvation. He says to walk in this direction until you come to the wicket gate and then get into the way through that gate. Our pilgrim, who is named Christian, does this and enters the way. While in the way he meets several other characters who also get in the way, but not through the gate and his question is always the same — will you be accepted when we get to the Celestial City that we are bound for? The response is always the same too, we are both in the way so what’s the difference? As well the characters are able to list their pious activities as proof of their suitability to enter the city.

As I’ve been reading I’ve been reminded of John Wesley’s sermon, *The Almost Christian*. This is no surprise since Wesley loved the Puritan writers, of which Bunyan was one. If you ever read that sermon, and I encourage you to do so, you will wonder what more a Christian could do to be a true Christian rather than an almost Christian. Wesley and Bunyan’s point is to critique many Christians of his day and to remind them that all their pious deeds — baptism, worship, prayer, alms giving, etc. — can simply make us religious rather than saved. They are driving home the point of the Reformation that salvation is by faith in Jesus alone. It is John’s passage where Jesus confesses himself to be the gate, and the only gate which can be saved. In short, the difference between the pilgrim and the wall climber is one entered the way of salvation through Jesus and the other through their own effort. To enter that way makes a person an interloper, a thief and a robber. It’s breaking and entering and no matter how pious the home invader is, he’s still invading without leave.

Jesus, Bunyan, and Wesley — and others! — alert us to the dangers of breaking and entering too. How have you entered? Through Jesus or through going to church, paying a tithe, praying, singing, reading? As wonderful as all these things are to do they mean nothing if you haven’t come through Jesus. In fact, says our fore-parents, they become a detriment because we think we have done everything we’ve needed to to secure entrance to the city, but in reality we’ve done everything to keep ourselves out of it.

Prayer

Gate of life draw us to you and let us in. Forgive us for trying to climb walls and make our own way. Let us hear your voice and know it. Amen.