

Alison Hobbs – third after Easter, ‘I am your door’

*Let's pray -Lord, may we hear your voice, in or through the word today. Come into our hearts and set them on fire with longing to know you more dearly, Amen.*

Doors are pretty significant features of my home at the moment. Most of the internal doors are stood open in our house so you can move around without having to use the door handles, which has benefits if you are carrying something - but I'm glad its not winter or it would be a very cold way to arrange the house.

The front door is another matter.

The front door is very definitely closed.

So is the garden gate.

Only those who live here, who have the right to be here, are expected to come in and out.

And on the whole, its not thieves slipping in unbidden that are my main worry these days, its that bigger category called ‘other people’.

I am very tired of living with an attitude of being on guard, its immensely wearing, and when I feel like rebelling and ‘letting it all be’, I remember its not entirely my choice to live like this right now, I do choose to see it as a necessity but not my preference.

I would love it if I could relax, but there are so many little, new, safety ceremonies and habits I've been obliged to adopt.

I want to leave all this stuff behind, outside, but it has a way of leaking in and following me around.

Into this fear and mess, Jesus speaks one of his great lines:

he starts with the prompt for us to listen-up:

“*Very truly, I tell you*”, then uses the term “*I AM*” – the prefix that alerts us to a statement, a characteristic that reveals his divinity, his identity as God, who identified himself to Moses as the great “*I AM*”.

So Jesus says to us today, “*I AM the gate for the sheep.*”

He says to me, “*I AM the door*”, if you choose to let me take that position in your house.

I AM the protection, the guardian of the hearth, the place of peace once you come through me, into your home.

With Jesus as the door, my house becomes a home, a place of homecoming, a place where I can start to relax, and trust again. The necessary precautions still have to be taken but they cease to be the focus, the neurosis, if Jesus abides with me.

Trust has been tricky recently, sensible precautions can read like suspicions, accusations that someone can't be trusted, socially bigger spaces read like rejections.

I need the loving safety of Jesus's presence to reverse those mis-read messages, to reduce them back down to just the etiquette of today that they are.

I need Jesus's love in me to enable me to reassure others that they are loved, and safe, and ok!

Jesus says,

*"Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture"*, that is, all we need for life.

So with Jesus as the doorway through which I pass to go out into the world, and come in, I can find a more loving way to interact with the world, more to be grateful for, a more generous heart.

Jesus extends to us the invitation to be saved, and he is the means: only through him are we able to be saved, to be made right with God, and therefore, with each other.

Stephen Verney, in a lovely book about the 'I AM' sayings in John, says Jesus is declaring he is more than just these worldly doors, he is declaring that he is the door between earth and heaven, one side of the door with its face to us, and one side of the door with its face to heaven.

One day, with the sound of trumpets, I shall make a one-way trip through that door, but even now, just sometimes, it seems we are offered little glimpses: its not a door that is barred and bolted.

Jesus is not only the gate but also the shepherd. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out ... he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.

There are many voices clamouring for my attention, most of them are electronic: emails, text messages, you-tube videos, and an abundance of resources in case I'm needing a gap plugging. But I'm lucky, these are not wailing and grieving voices, or voices demanding money that's not there, or voices questioning the point of life, or threatening, or vindictive voices. I'm neither speaking with, nor hearing, over-tired or over-wrought voices. I am indeed, fortunate.

What are the voices you are living with, in your head and in your hearing?

Or is there an almighty silence?

Elijah discovered that God's voice was the still, small voice that came in the great silence that followed the storm.

I wonder where Jesus' voice is most clearly heard?

For me, it is easier to listen for it if I can find a silence within me, but he doesn't need perfect conditions to show up and be heard: he is in the kindness of strangers – even electronic ones – and the giving and receiving of help - even at a distance.

But the best way, I think, to hear Jesus's voice is in the way described in the Acts passage which is describing the period immediately following Pentacost. It probably wasn't a period that lasted over long, after all, they would start to run out of the surplus of goods and possessions that they could sell, and other calls on their lives would take them in different directions.

But for this period, having newly received the Holy Spirit, the expanding band of believers are '*devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*'

And not only were they '*praising God and having the goodwill of all the people,*' but they were witnessing '*many wonders and signs,*' and finding themselves having '*glad and generous hearts*'.

Now, they were able to be eating together and spending much time together in the temple, which we are not at liberty to do, but we are at liberty to use many other means of communication together.

This is a season where some people are time rich and some are time deprived, and each must accept the situation they find themselves in, and work accordingly.

For those who are free to, this could be a time like no other for exploring the Christian tradition in whatever mode speaks to you most readily.

There may be books on your shelf – the bible perhaps! Or online writings to access.

A friend who might be glad to pray with you or discuss a bible passage, if you are bold enough to ask.

If the scene described in Acts makes you feel at all envious – go for it! Start tuning in anew to the voice of Jesus, calling and leading his sheep; watching over our going out and our coming in; opening new doors for us.

Throughout our lives, Jesus is calling us into being more and more the people he means us to be, showing us the way to be more fully ourselves and more fully his.

I pray that this week, we can all just stop a while and listen for him calling.

*Amen*