

## **Gateways and portals**

Last week Phee and I went to Dumbleton to see the Bluebells. On the way, there are some gates to go through. One of them a 'kissing' gate. And being the obedient people we are, we didn't disappoint!

In the course of a week we may go through many gateways. Hospital doors, bus or train doors, doors to a theatre, or cinema, through the door of a friends home, or to visit family. School gates, the village hall, the doors to our churches, a cafe, a crematorium, a walled garden and so much more. We cross hundreds if not thousands of thresholds in our lifetime. Some lead to adventure, some are mundane and some lead us through the valley of the shadow of death. We don't always know what will greet us on the other-side...

Today in our gospel reading we have one of the 'I Am' sayings, "I am the Gate", which is slightly confusing as Jesus also says 'I am the shepherd'. But that's for another sermon. In one sense Jesus is talking everyday language about how shepherds would literally become the gate for their sheep. Lying down in the gap of the wall so no thief can get in and the sheep can't escape out. But what Jesus is actually doing is opening their minds up to a whole new world and way of seeing things.

What Jesus is really saying is something more akin to what C.S. Lewis writes about in the Chronicles of Narnia.

The most well known way into Narnia is through the Wardrobe, though there are rings and other gateways too. As you go through the wardrobe you enter into a whole new world with a new set of rules, different from the one you've come from.

And this is what Jesus is really describing when talking about himself as the gate, He himself is a portal into the Kingdom of God.

But, not only is Jesus the way in, he is also the landscape beyond - I am the Way, the Truth & the Life. This is not a set of rules to live by, but a life to encounter. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." What a contrast to the 'rules' based religion

that the Religious elite were peddling - this is grace abounding, with freedom to roam and liberty to love.

It makes you wonder who are the thieves that steal, kill and destroy that Jesus speaks about?

In the last book of the Chronicles of Narnia 'The Last Battle' There is one final gateway to be entered. This time it is Aslan who takes them through a stable door - to a truer Narnia. It is here the phrase Further up and Further In becomes the refrain as they go deeper into the eternal landscape. This new world - this kingdom of God - is endless, it doesn't wear out, it is as high, wide and deep as God's love - it is eternal.

Further up and further in may help us to frame our faith journey too. As we navigate the Kingdom of God, the more it becomes part of who we are. We are changed by the landscape we inhabit and become people of this strange and wonderful world. It takes time, forever in fact, but begins with a simple intentional step through the gate. Who is Jesus.

There's a deeper truth, or deeper magic as C.S. Lewis puts it, at work here - the work of salvation - "Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture." The shackles of sin are shaken loose as we traverse through the 'sheep gate' which, and not incidentally, is the name of the gate in Jerusalem that the 'sacrificial lambs' were transported through. The Sacrificial Lamb, becomes the way of salvation for you and me.

These faraway worlds and distant landscapes are in fact as close as the beating of our hearts - the Kingdom of God is among you. Jesus has this uncanny knack of showing us something that is grounded in the reality of the ordinary, that points towards a cosmic reality, that is then pulled back down into the everyday.

How does the saying go 'We mustn't be so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good'.

This abundant life is to be lived out in the here and now. It is a wide, generous life-giving gospel that can and does have an impact, not only for us but those around us. As we go through the doors of the hospital to visit the sick, or the doors of a food pantry to feed those who are hungry, or the care home taking a service, the

school gates to do open the book, the neighbours pathway to make sure they're ok. These are our magic portals through which we take the gospel of Jesus week after week and year after year. Speaking truth and showing love.

And underneath all of this, holding it all, is the guardian of our souls, shepherding us and calling us by name - making us aware that we are known and we are loved.

So I wonder, if this week as we approach doors, gates, and entrances, if we could take a moment to pause on the threshold - becoming aware of God's presence in and around us and perhaps whisper to ourselves - I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly. Amen