

I am the Gate

- Six children
- Three adults
- Three chairs with legs not joined to others
- three racing sheep with yarn

Jesus said many memorable and pithy things – the kind of stuff you could put on an inspirational poster of clouds and sunset. You know the kind of thing:

I am the Light of the World. Great. Bringing illumination to everyone.

I am the Bread of Life. Fabulous. Food for our hungry souls.

I am the Good Shepherd. Awesome. Caring for and protecting his flock.

But then he said a few that sound a bit more - with the deepest respect, Lord - a bit more naff.

I am the Vine. So he had leaves growing out of his head and grapes hanging off his fingers? I think not.

I am the Gate. Wooden, square and bit squeaky on the hinges? I don't think that's what he was getting at.

So what was Jesus talking about when he said, "I am the Gate", or "I am the Door" in other translations?

Well, he was talking about a sheep pen. You know, the kind of thing they have on 'One Man and his Dog' where you have a pen made of three walls and one side that opens and the shepherd calls to the sheepdog things like "come by" and "walk on", and the sheepdogs, being super-intelligent, round up the sheep and get them in the pen.

So, here's a question for you. What the difference between the walls of the pen, and the gate?

[Ask cong. Hopefully they say, "The gate opens."]

Yes. The gate opens. The walls are there to separate, to keep the in *in* and the out *out*. The gate is there to make a way through. No gate, no getting in. Jesus was talking about how sheep get into the sheep pen - through the gate. He was using this as a picture of how people get into God's kingdom - through the gate.

"I am the gate," he said, "whoever enters through me shall be saved." Then he continued. "They will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to kill and steal and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." And the way to that fabulous full life? Through the [wait for answers] through the Gate. Through Jesus.

So how are we going to illustrate this in a memorable, accessible and amusing manner? Why, by having a sheep race, of course!

We will have three sheep racing to get through their gates. So I need three children to race the sheep, and three to be the gates. Plus three adults with chairs. (You don't have to do anything. You're just ballast.)

[Set up chairs one down each aisle, with an adult on each. Invite all children to the front to see better.

Give yarn ends to an older child and pass centre loop under one chair leg. Move chair up or down aisle until yarn is taut. Help sheep children put yarn ends on fingers. Practice.

Younger child stands astride yarn.]

Now we are going to have a race. When I say "Go!", sheep children, you waggle your hands to make the sheep run towards the gate. Gate children, you need to open the gate to let your sheep in. And we will need everyone encourage your sheep. What shall we call them? Ewenice? Baaatimaeus? Shaun ?

Sheep, are you ready? Gates, are you ready? Ballast, are you ready? Go!

[Raucous shouting until all sheep are home. Thank, give rewards, dismiss.]

"I am the gate for the sheep," said Jesus. "Whoever enters through me shall be saved. They shall come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to kill and steal and destroy, but I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."