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## *At the Door*

**A homily by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell  
at the funeral of John W. L. Foxworth III**

I want to tell you something about ushers.

Most of us don't know a lot about them. They hand us a bulletin. They show us to a seat. They take up the offering. And then, it seems, their work is done.

But watch an usher carefully, and you'll see something different.

An usher stands at the threshold — the place between the street and the sanctuary, between the world and whatever it is we come here looking for.

And what an usher does in that threshold place is see people.

The ushers see the woman who comes in late and is embarrassed about it. They see the man who is here for the first time and doesn't know where to sit. They see the family that is grieving, and the couple that is fighting, and the child who is bored before the service even begins.

A good usher — a great usher — meets every one of them in the same way: a steady presence, a quiet welcome, and an assurance that there is room, that they are expected, and that someone is glad they came.

John Foxworth did that for twenty-five years.

Jesus says, I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me.

We usually hear that as a statement about protection. The shepherd keeps the wolves away. And that's true, as far as it goes. But notice what Jesus says is at the center of the shepherd's work: knowing. I know my own. Not I manage my own. Not I administer my own. Not I have responsibility for my own. I know them.

I believe that the most profound thing God does is not solve our problems or fix what is broken in us, but simply be with us. The Word becomes flesh — not a memo, not a program, not a solution sent from a safe distance — but a person, a presence, a body standing at the threshold of our humanity and saying: I am here. I know you. There is room.

That is what the Good Shepherd does.

That is what John Foxworth did ... for twenty-five years!

Think about that. John didn't just try it, do it when it was easy or when it was convenient for him. He kept showing up, Sunday after Sunday, season after season, in the heat of Atlanta summers and the chaos of Christmas crowds, through his own griefs and his own joys, through whatever the week had brought — to keep standing at that door, bulletin in hand, ready to see whoever walked through it.

That kind of faithfulness is not glamorous. It doesn't make the papers. But it is one of the most Godlike things a person can do. Because God is like that.

The psalm we said together this morning says it plainly: The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time forth for evermore. Going out and coming in. Every threshold. Every departure and every return. God is there, steady, attentive, present — not occasionally, not when it's convenient, but always, from this time forth for evermore.

John learned that from somewhere. Or maybe he simply lived into it, Sunday by Sunday, until his own life had taken on something of its shape.

John died on a ship headed toward a sea port in northeastern. I would call it tree-EST. Sandy calls it tree-EHS-tah!

I find that extraordinarily beautiful. Not because it was dramatic — though it was — but because it was so completely John. He was moving. He was curious. He was with Sandy. He was, as he had always been, on his way toward something.

The liturgy we are praying today says that for God's faithful people, life is changed, not ended. I believe that. I believe that the man who stood at the door of this Cathedral for twenty-five years has now walked through a different door — and that on the other side of it, he was met the way he met so many others: with a steady presence, a quiet welcome, and the assurance that there is room, that he was expected, that someone was glad he came.

Everyone the Father gives to me will come to me, Jesus says. I will never turn away anyone who believes in me.

The Good Shepherd is at the door.

John would understand exactly what that means.

Sandy, Allison and Britt, Robert and Richard, the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren — you knew him in ways none of the rest of us did. You knew him at the grill, and over a jigsaw puzzle, and on some remarkable stretch of road in a country far from home. You knew the sound of his laugh and the particular way he paid attention to you.

What I can tell you, from this side of the aisle, is what he was here. He was faithful. He was present. He showed up. And in that showing up, week after week, year after year, he was doing something that looks — from where I stand — very much like what God does.

We give thanks for him. We grieve his absence. And we commend him, with confidence and with love, to the one who tends the gate, and who knows his own, and who never turns anyone away.

As John would have us say:

Alleluia, Christ is risen.

Amen.