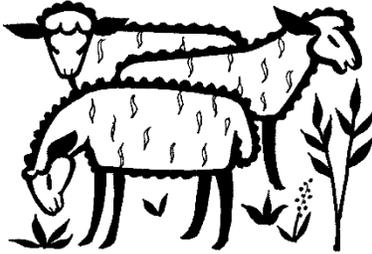


Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 25, 2021



Introduction

The image of the good shepherd shows us how the risen Christ brings us to life. It is the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep, one of mutual knowledge and love, that gives the shepherd authority. The shepherd's willingness to lay down his life for the sheep shows his love. First John illustrates what it means to lay down our lives for one another by the example of sharing our wealth with any sibling in need.

Thanksgiving for Baptism

You may want to have a small bowl of water available to remind you of your baptism!

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Refreshed by the resurrection life we share in Christ,
let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

We thank you, risen Christ,
for these waters where you make us new,
leading us from death to life, from tears to joy.
We bless you, risen Christ,
that your Spirit comes to us
in the grace-filled waters of rebirth,
like rains to our thirsting earth,
like streams that revive our souls,
like cups of cool water shared with strangers.

Breathe your peace on your church when we hide in fear.
Clothe us with your mercy and forgiveness.
Send us companions on our journey as we share your life.
Make us one, risen Christ.
Cleanse our hearts. Shower us with life.
To you be given all praise, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Gathering Hymn ELW # 778/ LBW # 451

The Lord's My Shepherd

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

O Lord Christ, good shepherd of the sheep, you seek the lost and guide us into your fold. Feed us, and we shall be satisfied; heal us, and we shall be whole. Make us one with you, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Psalm: Psalm 23

- ¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.
²**The LORD makes me lie down in green pastures
and leads me beside still waters.**
³You restore my soul, O LORD,
and guide me along right pathways for your name's sake.
⁴**Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I shall fear no evil; for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**
⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is running over.
⁶**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

Second Reading: 1 John 3:16-24

Jesus' death on our behalf is the clearest demonstration of divine love. This is the very love we share with others, not just through our words but especially through our deeds. In sharing such love we fulfill God's commandments.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Gospel: John 10:11-18

In language that recalls the twenty-third psalm, Jesus describes himself as the shepherd who cares for his sheep. He is willing to die for them, and he is able to overcome death for them.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

Today – the Fourth Sunday of Easter, is always Good Shepherd Sunday. Our Gospel text is always from the tenth chapter of John’s Gospel and the focus is on Jesus as the Good Shepherd. While shepherds are not common around here, I imagine most of us have some ideas about shepherds and what a shepherd might do.

We know the stories of David – the young shepherd boy who killed the Philistine with his sling and later became king. We know the Christmas story and the role of the shepherds who came to see the baby Christ child. And I would guess that most of you have heard more than a few sermons about shepherds.

The question today is what makes Jesus a “good shepherd?” What makes Jesus – a carpenter by trade and now an itinerant preacher - a better shepherd than anyone else?

The role of a shepherd is to lead the sheep – to green pastures, beside still waters, and safely through places of danger. These are the things that any shepherd knows to do. The safety of the flock is important, and sheep do not know enough to stay away from places of danger. So what makes a shepherd good?

Jesus was sent not just to keep us safe, but to reconcile us to God. Jesus, like a true shepherd, is not in it for himself, but for the sake of the other. The well-being of the flock is the most important thing there is. Jesus is there to show us God’s love for us, and not just for the people of Israel, but for all of us. God called the people of Israel to be his chosen people for the sake of the world – so that we would all know what it was to be loved and cared for. Jesus was the shepherd sent to lead us all to reconciliation with God – even through the valley of the shadow of death.

Jesus is the good shepherd because, as N.T. Wright puts it, when Jesus calls, people **want** to come to him. It is not just the calm voice calling that draws us, but that the sound of Jesus’ voice compels us to come. We know that Jesus will not only lead us through the dark places and keep us safe, but that Jesus is willing to die for us.

We live in a world filled with fear, even more so because of the pandemic. Fear of dying, fear of disease, fear of vaccines, fear of not having enough, fear of the loss of things as we know them – jobs, neighborhoods, family, church. Things change so fast that we fear change itself. Because of that fear, we look to anyone and everyone for reassurance that it will be OK. We look to politicians and news channels and tv preachers to try and make sense of what is happening and hoping they can comfort us.

The reality is that there is only one cure for our fears. That cure is Jesus – the Good Shepherd – the one who came to die so that we might not fear death – nor anything else. Because Jesus has already laid down his life for our sake – so that we might live. Because Jesus has promised that will have eternal life - with him.

Because Jesus – through the waters of baptism, through bread and wine, through these sacraments - has promised us salvation and forgiveness of our sins. Because God is love, as shown to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus – his only son – who came to shepherd us through life, through death, and into his eternal kingdom. On this fourth Sunday of Easter, we are reminded that Jesus is the Good Shepherd; that Jesus is the only shepherd we need – in this life or the next. Amen.

Hymn of the Day ELW # 502 / LBW # 456 *The King of Love My Shepherd Is*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Nicene Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

**We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,*
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

A brief silence.

Loving Shepherd, you know your own and your own know you. Your voice calls us to your loving embrace. Strengthen your church throughout the world that we bear witness to your expansive love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Gracious Shepherd, you are generous with the gifts of goodness and mercy. Restore your creation to wholeness so that cities and towns, countryside and wilderness, may abound with life. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Hope-giving Shepherd, the nations and peoples are your heritage. Place into the hearts of all leaders and rulers the passion to serve. Crucify any desire to overpower others and give leaders joy in lifting up the lowly. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Abiding Shepherd, your love flows as we reach out to those around us. Move us with your Spirit, so that we lay down our lives for those in need (*especially*). Help us love one another in truth and action. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Saving Shepherd, you restore us to wholeness. Help our community in our life together and give us vigor as a people of faith. In the midst of challenges and opportunities (*specific concerns may be named*), fill us anew with you Holy Spirit. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Eternal Shepherd, you hold us securely in your loving hands. In the assurance of resurrection hope, we remember our loved ones who have died in you (*especially the evangelist Mark*). Bring us, with them, to dwell in your house forever. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn ELW # 789 / LBW # 481 *Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Pastor Ray Sipe.