

Fourth Sunday of Easter May 3, 2020

Introduction

Today is sometimes called “Good Shepherd Sunday.” Jesus is called the “gate” of the sheep in today’s gospel. The risen Christ opens the way to abundant life. He anoints our heads with oil and guides us beside the still waters of our baptism. Each Sunday he spreads a feast before us amid the world’s violence and war. We go forth to be signs of the resurrection and extend God’s tender care to all creation.



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!

Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism,
we are raised with him to new life.
Let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

We give you thanks, O God,
for in the beginning you created us in your image
and planted us in a well-watered garden.
In the desert you promised pools of water for the parched,
and you gave us water from the rock.
When we did not know the way,
you sent the Good Shepherd to lead us to still waters.
At the cross, you watered us from Jesus’ wounded side,
and on this day, you shower us again with the water of life.
We praise you for your salvation through water,
and for all water everywhere.
Bathe us in your forgiveness, grace, and love.
Satisfy the thirsty, and give us the life only you can give.
To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever. **Amen.**

Gathering Hymn

Alle, Alle

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

O God our shepherd, you know your sheep by name and lead us to safety through the valleys of death. Guide us by your voice, that we may walk in certainty and security to the joyous feast prepared in your house, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you 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 Peter 2:19-25

Doing the right things does not guarantee that one will not experience difficulties, hardships, rejection, or even suffering. Here Christ is presented as the model for our path of endurance and loyalty to God, particularly amid adversity.

Read the text [here](#).

Gospel: John 10:1-10

Jesus uses an image familiar to the people of his day to make a point about spiritual leadership. Those who listen to Jesus are led to abundant life.

Read the text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

I don't know about you, but sheltering in place is getting old. I just finished my seventh week of limiting where I go and what I touch and who I see. Can we be done with this soon?

I have a feeling we will be at this a while longer. This pandemic brought with it feelings of loneliness, fear, and anxiety. Some of us may feel a little trapped. We're not exactly living the abundant life right now. The situation we're in is not God's intent for the world.

Psalm 23 is a popular funeral text because it has been a comfort for people over the years. We cry out to God in our worst times, in the dark, lonesome, valleys of life, and we hear, “Do not fear, I am with you.” Psalm 23 has several references to the Israelites’ journey through the wilderness. Those who have tuned in to my Bible study know that our God is the same God that freed the captive Israel from Pharaoh, led the people away from harm, and even when the people rebel and challenge God, God provides for their most essential needs.

This pandemic is not punishment for anything we or the world has done. Pandemics happen. Viruses transform and mutate over time, but God is our good shepherd. We know this from the example of Jesus. The world may deserve punishment for many transgressions, but the God of Psalm 23, and the God that we know through Jesus, the One that laid down his life for us, is the same God that walks with us in our suffering.

God's heart breaks with ours as loved ones are not allowed to visit family members in the hospital. This is not God's intent. We're living lonely, broken lives and we're getting tired of living like this. Oh Lord, how long? How long will this pandemic rage?

We must remember that this is the same God that sent God's only Son into the world not to condemn it, but what? ...To *save* it. Don't forget that we are Easter people. Jesus, our good shepherd, laid down his life for us so that the powers of sin, death, and the devil would have no hold over us anymore. *This* is the character of our God.

I want to make a point that Israel’s story is our story. We don't condemn the Jews or anyone that came before Jesus. Verse 8 is saying that Jesus is greater than all who came before him. Jesus is our true prophet. Any others that claim this are false prophets. Jesus is our Messiah and King and all others don't compare to him. *This* is the God in whom we put our trust when we are afraid.

We know that God will comfort us and protect us and guide us. May God lead us to the lush pastures of abundance that we long for. God, free us from fear and remind us of your presence among us. Unite and strengthen the body of Christ as we go another week through this pandemic. You know us by name, and we cling to you now. For some of us, you are the only hope we have left. Strengthen our relationships with you and others, because we need each other now more than ever.

Our God leads us beside still waters and looks for the best pastures for us to graze. Our God provides for us and welcomes *all* at the banquet table. We are fed and nourished by Christ’s body and blood, and I look forward to the day when we can do so again as God’s re-gathered body of Christ. But, until that time, remember that scripture is the cradle that holds Jesus. We meet Jesus there, in prayer, and in each other.

So, until the day we meet again, remember that God is with us in this valley; and may the Lord bless us and keep us, may the Lord's face shine upon us with grace and mercy, and may the Lord look upon us with favor and + give us peace. Amen.

Hymn of the Day

Have No Fear, Little Flock

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

Uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection, we join the people of God in all times and places in praying for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

Shepherding God, we thank you for the educational ministries of your church. Enrich the work of teachers, professors, mentors, advisors, and faculty at colleges, seminaries, and learning sites (*local colleges and seminaries may be named*). Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Creating God, we praise you for those who maintain and operate farm equipment, for those who plant and harvest crops, for local farmers' markets, and for those involved in agriculture of any kind. Strengthen their hands as they feed the world. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Guiding God, no one should be in want. Bid the nations to return to your paths of righteousness and inspire our leaders to walk in your ways, so that all may have the opportunity to live abundantly and sustainably. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Comforting God, you carry us tenderly. We pray for those who walk through dark valleys overshadowed by anxiety and overwhelmed with suffering (*especially those we name now*). Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Nurturing God, you desire justice for the hungry. Bless advocacy work, food pantries, and feeding ministries in our congregations (*local ministries may be named*). May none of our neighbors lack for basic needs. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Everlasting God, your beloved have heard your voice; you have called them by name and guided them to your side in death. We thank you for their lives of faithful witness. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

With bold confidence in your love, almighty God, we place all for whom we pray into your eternal care; through 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

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Vicar Natalie Cook.