

Fourth Sunday of Easter – May 7, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed: "Let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, "What are we to do, my brothers?" Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call." He testified with many other arguments, and was exhorting them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day.

Psalm: Ps 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

R. (1) The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
beside restful waters he leads me;
he refreshes my soul.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

He guides me in right paths
for his name's sake.

Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil; for you are at my side
with your rod and your staff
that give me courage.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for years to come.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 2:20b-25

Beloved: If you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten; instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Gospel: John 10:1-10

Jesus said: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as the shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice. But they will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers." Although Jesus used this figure of speech, the Pharisees did not realize what he was trying to tell them.

So Jesus said again, "Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly."



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

The Gospel this Sunday is about shepherds and their charges. What are some facts about these woolly creatures we call sheep? Start with a comparison. Remember your childhood when you turned various insects on their back? Childishly, you might have watched them struggle and never achieve their proper leg-side down position unless we had mercy on them. An unshorn sheep is the same way, shepherds tell us: completely stranded if it gets turned on its back. In order to turn it right-side up when it needs it, the shepherd carries a crook. He hooks the sheep and turns it right. He is kind and careful with his flock. They are not smart. But they follow him. History tells us that the many shepherds brought their small herds to Jerusalem, and that these various flocks were kept together in one big sheepfold. There were no brands, no markings of any kind, just a fuzzy mob. How, you might ask, does each shepherd retrieve the sheep that belong to him (or to his boss)?

Christ's call lets our fear drop away.

The first way is by calling each of his sheep by name. He has been with them on the hillsides to the point that they are no longer strangers to him; the one with the nick in its ear, the one with the pretty face, the one that limps. He has a name for each because they each have a personality that is special, just like you and I do. When they hear their names they come and follow. Second, the sheep recognizes not only its name but the actual voice of the shepherd. This voice is a much loved sound to it. It belongs to the one who flipped them back on their feet, the one who shielded them from wolves, the one who led them to fresh pastures instead of ones they had eaten down to nubs. A stranger's voice did not have the gentle consonance of their master and friend. His sheep flocked to him. Why does Jesus use such imagery on the Fourth Sunday of Easter? I suppose you know the answer already, but, if you will pardon the comparison, you and I are very similar to sheep. The shepherd calls them by name and the magnificent God of the universe calls each of us by name. Through Jesus, God knows each and every one of us better than we know ourselves. The name he confirms for each of us finds its way down to the deepest interior of our souls. Through it, he calls us to be most truly who we are, in our own self and in God. We may misunderstand the voice of God the shepherd, ignore it, resist it, button our ears tight against it, but in our moments of sane and solitary wholeness—or maybe in our times of trouble—our spirits pulse to the rhythm of that voice. It resounds within us. Like the shepherd with his sheep, this call is safe, in spite of wolves and wildness all around. Christ's call lets our fear drop away, turns us right side up, lets us follow our master and friend around rocks and even through dark valleys. Sometimes the phrase, "people are sheep," is deemed an insult. This Sunday it is the greatest compliment we could get.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. The people listening to Peter's sermon were "cut to the heart" with remorse. Does anything cut you to the heart? "Brothers, what should we do?" is what they asked. What action did they take? How do you think you would have responded to Peter's sermon?
2. Christ's innocence and lack of vengeance show us what God's love is like. Where do you find strength to endure your suffering? Can suffering be an occasion of grace?
3. When flocks were mingled together, each flock would recognize the sound of their own shepherd's voice and come to him, ignoring other shepherds. Can you discern in your life, which "voice" belongs to the Good Shepherd? Which of the following is your favorite comparison of Christ to the Good Shepherd: calling by name, recognition of voice, following the shepherd, not following strangers, or shepherd as gate? Explain.

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Almighty ever-living God, lead us to a share in the joys of heaven, so that the humble flock may reach where the brave Shepherd has gone before. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen