

Sermon for Easter 4C
Sunday, May 8, 2022
“Sheep and Shepherds alike”

Text: John 10:22-30; Psalm 23; Acts 9:36-43

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we begin the week that is at the midpoint in the Great Fifty Days of Easter, and during Eastertide, we remain focused on the principal theme of Easter, which is the proclamation that we have seen the risen Lord. During this festive season, we recognize that Jesus the Christ indeed is alive and that he lives and moves among us. In the midst of the joys and sorrows of our daily lives, we are reassured that because he lives, we can face whatever happens today, tomorrow, the next day, and the next. That is a very comforting thought indeed!

This particular Sunday is known as “Good Shepherd Sunday” because we hear in the gospel lesson echoes of the words of Jesus: “I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me.” The shepherd lays down his life for his sheep and protects his sheep from the wolves that sneak up intending to snatch them away. We are comforted in the knowledge that no matter what, God always has our back. That idea is reinforced in no better way than in the words of Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,” because God’s goodness and his mercy will follow us all the days of our lives and we remain in his comforting care forever. That’s a very powerful thing, especially during those times in our lives when we aren’t sure what’s going to happen next. Those times when our future seems uncertain. Those times when we feel helpless and hopeless, when we feel turmoil and desperation, when we feel like we don’t know how we will go on. Those times when we aren’t sure whether God is really there or not, in the midst of our fears, doubts, and questions. Because he is our shepherd, God will never abandon us.

When we proclaim the Easter message that we have seen the risen Lord, we say to the child afraid for her safety at home, to the spouse victimized by domestic violence, to the college student who wonders whether there will be any jobs after graduation, to the person fearful of being stopped by police because of his skin color, to the police officer who never knows what will happen when he arrives on the scene, to the person midway through life afraid of losing her career, to the retiree with no idea of what to do with so much free time, to the one mired in grief at the loss of a child or a spouse or other loved one, to the person shattered by the disintegration of a relationship: when life conspires to make us feel unsafe and unworthy, God’s undying, unconditional, and unyielding love will get us through it. “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. No one will snatch them out of my hand.” We live in scary times, but John’s message to us who hear it in his gospel is that no matter what, God will not abandon us, and a better day is coming.

But there’s another message for us in the words of Jesus. In proclaiming the message of Easter that we have seen the risen Lord and that God lives and moves

among us, we are the mouths, hands, and feet of God in the world. Inasmuch as God always comforts and shepherds us as our shepherd, we are also responsible for being shepherds to each other. It is our duty as Christians to live our lives in such a way so as to proclaim that God does not abandon his people, and that God's transformation of life here on earth will be done through us. It's up to us to help make this world a better place for ourselves and for our sisters and brothers.

This understanding of what it means to be part of the flock of Jesus Christ, sheep who know his voice and follow him, is seen in our lesson from the Acts of the Apostles today in which Peter brought Tabitha (also, called Dorcas in Greek) back to life. Peter had taken seriously Jesus's command to him that we heard last week to feed his sheep and tend his lambs, and was thus empowered to continue God's work in the world. As members of Jesus's flock through our baptism, inasmuch as we are his sheep, we are all his shepherds too, charged with caring for each other.

Very shortly, we will welcome two individuals as they become part of Jesus's flock through baptism. The declarations that they will make, or that their godparents will make on their behalf, and the vows that we will renew are serious statements; they form the core of who we are as Christians, of what we believe, and of how we live our lives from day to day. Our response to whatever is happening in our lives, in our nation, and in the world should always reflect the vows that we take in our baptismal covenant: to seek and serve Christ in all persons, to love our neighbor as ourselves, to strive for justice and peace among *all* people, and to respect the dignity of every human being. Our response to what happens in our communities, city, the nation, and the world should always reflect our commitment to Christ at our baptism. But we also commit to helping each other be better Christians through teaching, guidance, spiritual support, and prayer. We will commit to being the family of Christ to our newest members as they seek and serve Christ daily.

It's good to know that we have a shepherd, because when things get tough in life and we don't see our way forward, we know that God walks with us and leads us. God is always there for us in good times and bad, and the scriptures reassure us that God will never abandon us. We must also remember that the shepherd expects much from the sheep: that we must also shepherd each other to make a difference in each others' lives and bring us all just a little bit closer to the realization of God's Kingdom. Amen.

Resource

David Lose, "Easter 4C: The Electing Word," in *In the Meantime*,
<http://www.davidlose.net/2016/04/easter-4-c-the-electing-word/>