

Worship – May 3, 2020

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP – Pause for a few moments of meditation before beginning worship CALL TO WORSHIP

*We worship in the presence of our Shepherd God,
The one who calls us each by name,
The one who restores our souls,
The one who leads us in the way of righteousness, and
whose goodness and love never stops pursuing us.*

This is the God we worship!

*We worship in the presence of our Shepherd God,
The Shepherd of our souls,
The one who has created us,
The one who sustains us, who redeems us, who walks beside us in good times and bad, and
who calls us to follow.*

This is the God we worship!

A BRIEF CONFESSION

In the surety of the Risen Christ, we are confident to make our confession to God.

Lord of Life, hear the prayers of your people.

In the surety of the Risen Christ, we confess our failures and brokenness.

Lord of Life, forgive and heal your people.

In the surety of the Risen Christ, we seek God's mercy and compassion.

Lord of Life, renew for service, we your people.

God forgives, heals, and renews us for blessing in the world. Amen.

GREETING

*The Lord be with you
May you know Jesus as your Good Shepherd.
In this time of worship God calls you by name and unites us all as the People of God.*

SCRIPTURE READINGS

1st reading – Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

2nd reading – Psalm 23

***The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;***

*he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.*

Gospel reading – John 10:1-10

'Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

SERMON

<https://youtu.be/rtlq-1hdJA>

4th Sunday of Easter

IT'S A PUZZEL

May 15, 2011

John 10:1-10

It puzzles me (and it should you): Why is Jesus as a shepherd
such a BIG and COMFORTING image for us?



I mean, how many of you are shepherds out there ... probably none of you.

OK

Maybe you are a retired shepherd ... probably not.

OK, then

Do you know a shepherd personally ... I doubt it.

Hmmm ... how about this:

Have you heard of shepherds being in the news lately.

Or, try this one:

Would you like to be a shepherd living outside on the Chaparral watching your sheep graze, sleeping with them at night, constantly herding them to all stay together in one flock.

You see, it puzzles me why

this image of Jesus as a shepherd is so well-liked,
admired,
loved, and
clung to as the everlasting symbol of who Jesus is.

None of us are shepherds.

None of us even know anyone whose profession is a shepherd.

Most of us know very little about what goes into being a shepherd.

It puzzles me as to why Jesus as a shepherd

is such an enduring and comforting image ... it seems to have outlived the presence of

shepherds among us and the familiarity of what shepherding is .

I get that when Jesus conjured-up the image

over 2000 years ago on the pastoral plains of Palestine, that the vocation of shepherd and livelihood of shepherding was much more common.

I get that when Jesus used the image of a shepherd that he was tapping into

a long history of both oral and written tradition **employed by the Jewish people ... he knew the image was rich for his listeners ... not only because they knew of and in some cases**

were shepherds, but also because the activity of shepherding was laced and woven in how the people spoke of the God/human relationship.

The 23rd Psalm ... we read it today ... church-goers and non church-goers, even



non-religious people ... have some familiarity with this “*Shepherd’s Psalm*” as it is sometimes referred to.

And this Sunday, the 4th Sunday of Easter, is designated as “*Good Shepherd Sunday*”

And so it puzzles me, in light of the fact, that

shepherds (as people) and shepherding (as an activity) is absent from our everyday lives ... it puzzles me as to the enduring quality of Jesus as the *Good Shepherd*.

So, what’s the deal?

The deal is ... this image endures because it conveys to us the personal nature of our relationship with God

In the Gospel of John, seven times Jesus speaks

of himself in metaphor to describe his relationship with us ... these are called the “I Am”

statements - I AM the bread of life

I AM the light of the world

I AM the door or the gate

I AM the true vine ... and so forth ... today we hear Jesus words of metaphor as

I AM the good shepherd

When we hear this language ... “I Am the bread of life”

“I Am the good shepherd”

“I Am ...”

“I Am ... it conveys to us the sense that Jesus is speaking to us personally.

He’s not calling out into the big vast and impersonal universe billions & billions of light years

long and filled with billions & billions of stars, planets, and galaxies THAT HE is the true

vine or the bread of life ... NO ... he is saying these things to us, to you and to me.

And today Jesus says to us ... *I am the good Shepherd*



These "*I am*" statements are personal, they express

God's intimacy with humanity ... so when we hear Jesus say, "*I AM the good shepherd*" we are hearing that he is MY shepherd as in *the Lord is my shepherd* of the 23rd Psalm.

In certain Christian circles it was, and perhaps still is,

a question **that was often times asked of people** ... *Do you know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?*

Unfortunately, that question

became a signal to many that they were being encountered by a "Bible Thumper" who felt that it was their mission to help you get "saved".

I say that this is unfortunate because the feeling of knowing Jesus in a personal way such that we can pray to God the deepest concerns of our heart that we would never dare share with anyone else ... well, that is such a spiritual gift.

Many of us have good shepherd stories ... you know,

Good Shepherd Stories

the stories of a time in our lives or the lives of people we know where we definitely felt

that Jesus, the good shepherd, somehow interceded,
was present,
helped us through a difficult or scary experience.

I had one when I was a teenager I'll never forget

I was 16 or 17 ... I don't remember exactly how old I was.

I know that I had been driving for a number of months, but still was too young to be out with the car after midnight ... That was the law in Pennsylvania where I grew-up.

If you were under 18 years of age, driving privileges expired at midnight until 6:00 a.m.

It was after midnight ... I was a little nervous about that.

I was stopped at a red light, at an intersection of the kind where you cannot see the coming the traffic that has the green light ... you can't see them until they're almost into the center of the intersection itself.

So in a situation like that ... you just trust, that when their light turns red for them, they'll stop;
and
when yours turns green, you can go without incident.

Well, I had the music playing rather loud as teenagers do in the car.

And as you can sometimes do with traffic lights (especially at night), you can see (as you're sitting at your red light) ... you can see when the green light for the others turns yellow.

My teenage practice was to hedge up to the intersection when I saw "their" green light turn yellow, so that I could scoot right out and go when the signal turned green for me

For some reason, I didn't do that on this night.

I was almost in a trance-like state ... music blaring,
watching the light,
seeing "their" light turn from green to yellow,
seeing "my" turn from red to green.

I didn't go (no one was behind me) my light turned green ... AND I DIDN'T GO.

And suddenly I was shaken out of my trance ... just then a car
coming from my left,
went racing through the intersection,
at a high rate of speed,
right through a red light.

Had I followed my usual teenage practice of inching toward the intersection, and going the split second I had the green light ... well, I might not be here talking with you right now if I had.

I've never forgotten that ... it was such a shock to see that car speeding through the intersection and me just sitting there even though I had a green light.

Over the years ... this has become my personal "good shepherd" story.

What's yours ... do you have a "good shepherd" story?

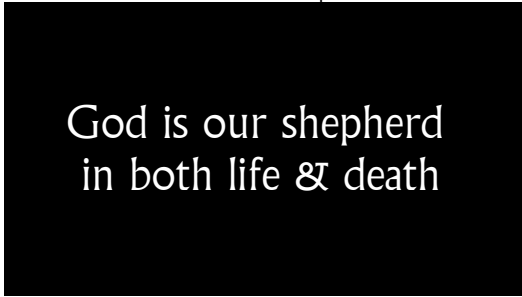
Anyway, being the kind of person that I am ... inquisitive and not settling for easy answers:

I ask myself ... *"Others have been in similar situations as I just described, and yet the accident happen, the bad outcome occurs ... there's injury or even death. I ask myself: WHY, why was Jesus not their good shepherd in their time of need?"*

Of course, there are no answers to a question like that.

But, I've come to look at it this way over the years,
that had my situation turned out differently ... Jesus would have "*shepherded*" me to health if I was injured or into the presence of the loving God in whom I believe, had I died.

Not much else to say beyond that ... other than
God is present, God is our shepherd, in both life & death



God is our shepherd
in both life & death

So, while your "good shepherd" story may be

a personal one, it's not private one, in the sense that, we are all called to be God's Shepherds

in this world where many need to be cared for,
protected,
defended,
provided for, and
loved.

So, in this time of CORVID-19 ... Maybe you are being cared for by a Good Shepherd.
Maybe you are being a Good Shepherd for one in need of care.

The Bethany Phone Calling Initiative, instituted

since the "stay at home" protocol put in place ... this is a shepherding activity where God's care

and love is conveyed through the simple act of a phone call.

In some cases, these phone calls have evolved into
delivering a meal or two,

going to the store to pick-up needed items, or the call becoming an “*extended call*” where the whole Sunday worship service is read to the one being called.

In these unprecedented times, the

opportunities to be a shepherd or to be cared for by a “Good Shepherd” is, perhaps a little more obvious ... but when this pandemic ends, the work of shepherding will continue.

God calls us as followers of Jesus, the Good Shepherd,

to be shepherds ourselves ... and when we are on the receiving end of that shepherding activity to be grateful for God’s constant love and care in our lives.

We are shepherds, we are the arms, hands, and legs

of Jesus, the Good Shepherd ... be you on the receiving end or the giving end of a “Good Shepherd” story – it is a story of God’s constant and loving presence in our lives and in the world. AMEN

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

We believe in a Shepherd God who created us in love and in the image of the divine. God provides, sustains, and nourishes us to live abundantly bringing goodness and life to the earth.

We believe in Jesus who shepherds us in the ways of compassionate service. Because of his life and ministry, his death and resurrection we are called to live in the example of Jesus.

We believe in God’s Holy Spirit who empowers us to shine forth the light of Christ. Like a shepherd, the Holy Spirit guides us to use the gifts with which God has blessed us to proclaim the love of God. Energized by this Spirit, our words and actions become the Body of Christ in the world. AMEN

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

*Jesus, you travelled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.” At your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus, that we may experience the healing love of the Good Shepherd. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.***

*We pray for healing for those who are sick. May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.***

*Heal us from our fears which prevent nations from working together and neighbors from helping one another. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.***

*Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to a disease that knows no borders. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.***

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow.

We trust in your eternal care for those who have died from this virus.

*Be with the families of those who are sick or have died. As they worry and grieve, strengthen by the presence of your shepherding power. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.***

Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected with Corvid-19 and who put themselves at risk in the process.

*Be with the leaders of all nations. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve. Give them the wisdom to invest in long-term solutions that will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.***

*Whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness or only a few, Jesus our Good Shepherd, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare. In place of our anxiety, give us your peace. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.***

OFFERING – Thank you for continuing to mail your offerings to the church
Bethany Lutheran, 4300 N 82nd St., Scottsdale, AZ 85251

PRAYER OF BLESSING

Let us pray:

Good and gracious God, you are the source of all blessing. In generosity, you provide all we need for the living of our lives. We, in turn, are called to be generous ourselves. We pray that what we give be used as an expression of your presence and healing in the world. We thank you for this opportunity to give back something of the blessings we have received from your hand. AMEN.

BENEDICTION

*May the majesty of God the Creator
be the light by which you walk.*

*May the compassion of Jesus the Good Shepherd
be the love by which you walk.*

*May the presence of the Spirit
be the power by which you walk. Amen*

DISMISSAL

*Jesus is our Shepherd. He sends us to be shepherds in the world.
Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are sent and we go. Thanks be to God!*