

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

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 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.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia. Jesus says, I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.

Alleluia. (John 10:14)

Gathering Hymn - *My Shepherd, You Supply My Need*

My Shepherd, you supply my need; most holy is your name.

In pastures fresh you make me feed, beside the living stream.

You bring my wandering spirit back when I forsake your ways,
and lead me, for your mercy's sake, in paths of truth and grace.

When I walk through the shades of death, your presence is my stay;

one word of your supporting breath dries all my fears away.

Your hand, in sight of all my foes, does still my table spread;

my cup with blessings over flows, your oil anoints my head.

The sure provisions of my God attend me all my days;

oh, may your house be my abode and all my work be praise.

Here would I find a settled rest, while others go and come;

no more a stranger or a guest, but like a child at home.

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.

Readings and Psalm

Acts 2:42-47 (*Please use this as an opportunity to read from your bible*).

Today's reading is a description of life in the community following Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out on God's people. The new community is sustained in worship and fellowship, shares what they have, and ensures that everyone has enough.

Psalm 23 (*This is one of the most beautiful and well known psalms in the Bible and it would be a shame to miss highlighting this psalm and giving it some well deserved attention in light of today's message. Thanks to Connie Landstrom for this special reflection. I have taken the liberty to incorporate some her comments here. Thank you Connie.*)

"I wonder how many times you've said or heard the words of Psalm 23...

- of all the psalms it's probably the best known and many people's favourite ...maybe yours too!
- the words are familiar and beloved...I suspect most of you know the words, and some of you have even memorized them
- we have learned that those words comfort us in times of uncertainty and sustain us through sorrows and losses...
- they give us courage when we are afraid...they assure us there is nothing to fear in the dark valley of death...
- they offer hope and strength to take our next step...
- they remind us there is a way forward when we feel powerless and fearful...
- they promise us that we never walk alone...

How fortunate are we that Psalm 23 is the Psalm appointed for today!...

- these words are exactly what we need to hear today in the midst of COVID-19...
- I want to give these words to the grieving in Nova Scotia, to those who have lost loved ones to the virus...to all who are filled with sorrow, confusion, loss and grief

When I look at all that has changed about our life and world...

- when I acknowledge the uncertainties of our future...
- when I read the statistics of cases and deaths...
- when I think about those who are losing jobs or income...
- when I wonder how long it will be before we again greet each other with hugs, kisses, and handshakes...
- I don't want more information or answers about COVID-19...I don't want more instructions on what to do or not do...I want to hear words of hope...
- I want to be reminded that "*the Lord is my shepherd*" and "*I shall not be in want.*"
- I want to be reassured that all shall be well...
- I want to soak myself in the words of Psalm 23 and let them soak into me...
- and I am thinking you want the same things I do

So today I want to suggest you do something now as your worship...

- could you let this be your new prayer practice for this week...or even longer!
- take Psalm 23... and pray it when you get up in the morning...
- pray it again at noon...pray it again before you fall asleep...
- pray it for yourselves, for each other, Nova Scotia, for Canada, for your family, neighbours, and for the world
- pray it slowly and pray it deeply...enjoy some silence between verses...kind of a soaking space between each verse
- consider praying each verse slowly and prayerfully...

How fortunate are we that Psalm 23 is the psalm appointed for today?

- isn't it exactly what we need to hear today...and tomorrow, and the next day...and the days and days after that!"

1 Peter 2:19-25 *(Please use this as an opportunity to read from your bible).*

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.

Gospel Reading

Glory to you, Oh Lord

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 gate keeper 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."

Praise to you, Oh Christ

Sermon

The Good Shepherd

Hymn of the Day - Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us

Savior like a shepherd lead us; much we need your tender care
In your pleasant pastures feed us, for our use your fold prepare.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, you have bought us; we are yours.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, you have bought us; we are yours.

We are yours; in love befriend us, be the guardian of our way;
keep your flock, from sin defend us, seek us when we go astray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, hear us children when we pray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, hear us children when we pray.

You have promised to receive us, poor and sinful though we be;
you have mercy to relieve us, grace to cleanse and power to free.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, early let us turn to you.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, early let us turn to you

Early let us seek your favor, early let us do your will;
blessed Lord and only Savior, with your love our spirits fill.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, you have loved us, love us still.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, you have loved us, love us still.

Apostle's Creed

I believe in God the Father almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord;
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
Born of the Virgin Mary;
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, dead, and buried;
He descended into hell;
The third day He rose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven,
And is seated at the right hand of
God the Father almighty;
He will come again
To judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Ghost;
The Holy catholic church,
The communion of saints;
The forgiveness of sins;
The resurrection of the body;
And the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Gracious God. Creator of the Universe. We come before you today with humble hearts, eager and willing to hear your voice and follow you. We want you to be our shepherd. We yearn to hear your voice calling us and leading us into pastures green and beside still waters. You are the patient one. You are the holy one. You are the one who loves us more than we can ask or imagine. And so we give you thanks. Thank you for your loving kindness, your very present help in time of need, forgiveness of our sins, and wisdom and knowledge to live our lives here on earth. You are always present; always eager to have us call upon your name. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Creator 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. For truck drivers who bring our stores the food we all need and for clerks and cashiers in the grocery stores. 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. We especially remember those who lost family members and friends in the shootings in Nova Scotia and in Fort McMurray where residents are having to deal with the flooding of their city and homes, so soon after the fires that destroyed their city. Bring each one comfort and hope for the future. **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 community. May none of our neighbours lack for basic needs. May we open our hearts in generosity to those in greater need, particularly the homeless. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

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. *(You may say a private prayer here for any loved ones who have passed away.)* **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. *(Please take time to pray here for any family members or friends who need special remembering at this time.)* **Amen.**

Sharing of the Peace

Please reach out to others through social media and phone, if possible to check up on our family, friends and neighbours - especially those who cannot get out at all.

Offering Prayer

God of Life, the gifts we bring are the gifts of our time, our possessions and talents. These are the resources of our life and labour. You have given these to us to be good and faithful stewards of all we have. Keep us faithful and generous as we live our life for You. **Amen** *(Please remember to keep your financial support for Living Faith during this especially unusual time. Thank you.)*

The Lord's Prayer (Sung)

Our Father who are art in heaven
Hallowed would 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
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil
For thine is the kingdom
The power and the glory
Forever and ever **Amen**

Benediction

May the Lord bless you and keep you
May He make his face shine upon you
And be gracious unto you
May He lift up his countenance upon you
And give you His peace.

