

Home Service for April 30, 2023

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

God of goodness and mercy, follow me all my days! Source of grace and compassion flow from me all my days!

Call to Worship:

Hey, you sheep. Yes, you over there. Can't you hear the shepherd calling; calling you to come and join with the others? There's life and love and care and direction here just waiting for you to hear and see. So come on in through the gate. He's been waiting for you. Amen

Opening Prayer:

Shepherding God, bring us into your fold. Lead us beside still waters and restore our souls. Help us see the way we should go, the way we should live. Help us hear your voice calling our name. Enliven this time of worship, that we may find true life as we join with others: praising your name, celebrating your great goodness, and sharing your love for all people. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Shepherding God, be with us in our need. Like sheep who have gone astray; we have not heeded your voice, calling us to follow the right paths, beckoning us to lie down and be restored; we have acted as if our salvation lies in busyness and control. We do not want to be sheep; dependent on a shepherd for everything. We want to do it alone; to maintain our independence. Forgive us for rejecting your shepherding care and your love and guidance. Forgive us for our need to do it by ourselves, to be separate from the flock. Forgive us for doubting your presence in times of trouble. Forgive us our despair in the face of seemingly unrelenting evil and death. Lead us back to the path of life. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Jesus said, I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly. In so confessing, we have returned to the shepherd, the guardian of our souls who welcomes us with open arms and a glad heart. Know that the shepherd of our lives never abandons us, is always calling our name, and unfailingly loves and forgives us.

Read Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth 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

Prayers of the People:

Help us to move beyond the “sampler” prayer so often found printed on pillows, on wall hangings: "The Lord is my Shepherd." Help us to understand what those words truly mean, O Lord. We can count on you. You are the one who holds our lives, guides our steps, comforts and sustains us. You want for us the lush greenness of verdant pastures and the alluring draw of still waters; yet you know that our lives will not be smooth; there will be rough times. We can count on you, Lord. We can place our trust in you. Help us to feel the power of the Psalmist's words: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." Nothing can trouble, nothing can threaten. You are with us. As we reach out in love and service to others, remind us that the work we do in your name, with love and compassion, is an echo of your tender mercy and loving care. Strengthen us and give us enthusiasm to follow the Shepherd all the days of our lives. AMEN.

Lord's Prayer

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

Read the Lesson: Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Read the Epistle Lesson: 1 Peter 2:19-25

For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

²² "He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth."^[a]

²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." ²⁵ For "you were like sheep going astray,"^[b] but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Read the Gospel Lesson: John 10:1-10

“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.^[a] They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Message

I would like to start with a short story: Two men were called on, in a large classroom, to recite the Twenty-third Psalm. One was an orator trained in speech technique and drama. He repeated the psalm in a powerful way. When he finished, the audience cheered and asked for an encore that they might hear his wonderful voice again. Then the other man repeated the same words--’The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...’ but when he finished, no sound came from the class. Instead, people sat in a mood of deep devotion and prayer. Then the first man stood to his feet. “I have a confession to make,” he said. “The difference between what you have just heard from my friend, and what you heard from me is this: I know the Psalm, but my friend knows the Shepherd.”

John uses many images in his Gospel, but I must admit my favorite one is that of Jesus as a shepherd. Maybe that is why I love the Twenty-third Palm. Like a shepherd, Jesus is concerned with the welfare and the care of His sheep. The shepherd loves his sheep. Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd. He didn’t call himself King Jesus; He didn’t call himself President Jesus; He didn’t call himself Mayor Jesus; Doctor Jesus; Reverend Jesus; Or Chairman Jesus, but he called himself a shepherd’ A servant, A caretaker, A watchmen, A provider; He called himself a shepherd. That is what really stands out in my mind, for we are his people and the sheep of his pasture, so we depend on God for everything. Just as a shepherd watches over his sheep, so does God watch over us, his children.

Our gospel lesson is the prelude to the section about the Good Shepherd. Jesus is talking about himself as the door to the sheep fold. Jesus is saying that those who enter, enter through him. He is the gate, the door to the sheep fold. Others who enter any other way are thieves and robbers.

Then Jesus says that He will lead the sheep because he knows them by name. And because He knows them by name, the sheep will follow and they will come out and go in and will find pasture. And then he says: I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. Jesus is saying that through Him we may have life and have it abundantly. A fulfilled life, a life not without sorrow or pain, but a life filled because we have Jesus as our guide. Jesus will lead us, and we will follow because he calls us by name through our baptism. He leads, we follow.

In Jesus' day the work of the shepherd was well known. Jesus often compared spiritual principles to things found in the everyday life of his contemporaries. In the Gospel, Jesus uses the imagery of a shepherd to help us better understand how he relates to his followers. The first image is that of a shepherd going and coming through a door to the sheepfold. The second is that of sheep coming and going through that door.

Jesus' words should remind us of a low stone fence surrounding a Palestinian home. The shepherd shelters his sheep in the fold within this fence at night. Thieves and robbers will climb over the wall, causing the sheep to bleat and scurry about. The shepherd knows that entry by the door of the fold is calming to the sheep. The sheep recognize their shepherd and respond with relief. The good shepherd is deliberate, careful, cautious, caring. We have a shepherd who cares about us. We are known by God and cared for by our Lord. We are the sheep he tends. Jesus is telling us he is the door to the sheep fold that who goes in or out has to go through Jesus. If the shepherd and his flock were away from the home, the shepherd would either find a natural sheep fold to put his sheep in for the night or he would build one out of sticks and rock, but he would be the door to the fold. He would lie down in the doorway so the sheep could not escape and wild animals would not be able to enter and eat the sheep. Jesus is the door to the sheepfold of salvation. It is through him that we must pass in order to receive salvation.

The 1st phrase in of our hymn “Savior, like a shepherd lead us.” Shepherds go before their flock; they lead their flock, never asking them to do anything that they wouldn’t do first. “...and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.” Even though flocks may mingle together, each flock knew it’s own shepherd’s voice, and each would follow it’s own shepherd and no other.

Our hymn continues, “Much we need thy tender care; In thy pleasant pastures feed us, for our use thy folds prepare.” The sheep pen had only one door. When the sheep returned to the fold at night after a day of grazing in the pleasant pastures, the shepherd stood in the doorway and inspected each one with tender care as it entered. If a sheep was scratched or wounded by thorns, the shepherd would anoint it with oil to facilitate healing. If they were thirsty, he gave them water. After all had been counted and brought into the pen, the shepherd would lay across the doorway so no intruder could enter. The shepherd thus became the door. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who protects and sustains the life of the sheep. Jesus said, “I am the gate for the sheep.”

The rest of our song tells us that, “Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, thou hast bought us, thine we are.” The distinguishing mark of the good shepherd is that the good shepherd would lay down his life for the sheep. He was their protector. When Jesus laid down His life for the sheep He saved us from the destroying wolves of sin and death. He gave His life to kill them and take away their power so they could not destroy the flock. But the story does not end here with the shepherd dead and the sheep scattered. Verse 18 tells us why as Jesus says: No man takes my life from Me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it up again. I have received this command from My Father. Under the Old Testament law, the sheep died for the shepherd, but now the Good Shepherd dies for the sheep!

Jesus will keep us safe in the sheepfold if we are smart sheep and follow him. Our success as followers of Jesus is based on the love of a shepherd who was willing to lay down his life for us. He loved us enough that our sinfulness became his burden. He loved us enough that his perfect rightness became ours. He loved us enough to suffer on the cross for us. To save us from eternal death. To prepare us to meet His Father. He will keep us safe in the sheepfold if we are smart sheep and follow the Good Shepherd.

Let us pray: Father God, in Jesus we have a true shepherd. We come together as the sheep of his fold to worship you and give thanks for this great gift. Help us to draw close to you that by your love and our attentive listening we may become so familiar with Christ’s voice that we will not be deceived or led astray by any other. Nurture and equip us as faithful followers of your gospel according to Christ’s example, we pray. Amen

Benediction:

We have been refreshed and restored.

We have been called and guided.

*Let us go forth knowing who our true shepherd is,
following his path, secure in the knowledge
that goodness and mercy will follow us
all the days of our life. Amen.*