



Easter 4

April 21, 2024



9:00 AM

Welcome to our worship of the Lord Jesus Christ on this Fourth Sunday of Easter! The image of the Good Shepherd shows us how the risen Christ brings us to life. It's the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep, one of mutual knowledge and love, that gives the shepherd authority. The shepherd's willingness to lay down his life for the sheep shows his love. Christ Jesus as our Good Shepherd is about so much more than Jesus holding cute and cuddly little lambs; it's about the life-giving power of God's self-giving, courageous, loving solidarity with us.

*Congregational responses are printed in **indented boldface italics**.*

GATHERING

GATHERING MUSIC

GATHERING HYMN:

"I Know... My Redeemer Lives!"

[v. 1-2, 4-5, 8]

ELW 619

*I know that my Redeemer lives! What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, He lives, who once was dead; He lives, my ever-living head!*

*He lives triumphant from the grave; He lives eternally to save;
He lives exalted, throned above; He lives to rule His Church in love.*

*He lives to silence all my fears; He lives to wipe away my tears;
He lives to calm my troubled heart; He lives all blessings to impart.*

*He lives to bless me with His love; He lives to plead for me above;
He lives my hungry soul to feed; He lives to help in time of need.*

*He lives— all glory to His name! He lives, my Savior, still the same;
What joy this blest assurance gives: I know that my Redeemer lives!*

INVOCATION, CONFESSION, AND FORGIVENESS:

We gather today just as God has gathered us into His family in our Baptism:
in the Name of the Father, and of the ✝ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Almighty God, to You all hearts are open, all desires known;
and from You no secrets are hid.

Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love You and worthily magnify Your holy Name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
But if we confess our sins, God who's faithful and just will forgive us our sins
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So let's confess our sin against God and one another:

Silence for reflection and self-examination.

Most merciful God,

we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves.

***We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done and by what we have left undone.***

We have not loved You with our whole heart;

we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

For the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.

***Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will
and walk in Your ways, to the glory of Your holy Name. Amen.***

Listen to the Good News, brothers and sisters:

In the mercy of Almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for you,
and for His sake, ✝ God forgives you all your sins!

To those who believe in Jesus Christ, He gives the power to become the children of God
and bestows on them the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

HYMN OF PRAISE:

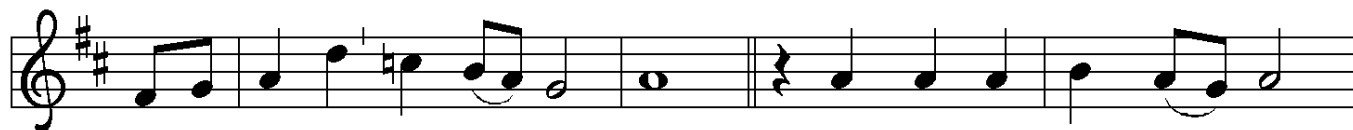
“This is the Feast of Victory!”

→

Refrain



This is the feast of vic-to-ry for our God. Al-le - lu - ia,



al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia. 1 Wor - thy is Christ, the Lamb



who was slain, whose blood set us free to be peo - ple of God.

Refrain



This is the feast of vic-to-ry for our God. Al-le - lu - ia,



al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia. 2 Pow - er, rich - es, wis - dom, and

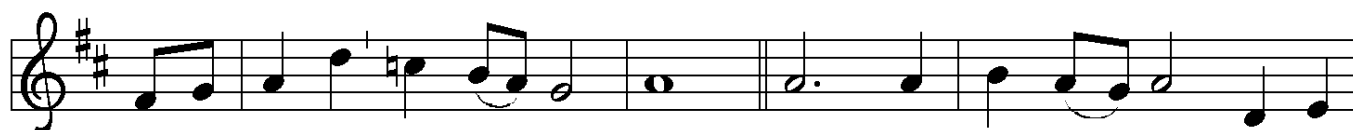


strength, and hon - or, bless - ing, and glo - ry are his.

Refrain



This is the feast of vic-to-ry for our God. Al-le - lu - ia,



al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia. 3 Sing with all the peo - ple of >

God, and join in the hymn of all cre - a - tion: Bless - ing, hon - or,

glo - ry, and might be to God and the Lamb for - ev - er. A - men.

Refrain

This is the feast of vic-to-ry for our God. Al-le - lu - ia,

al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia. 4 For the Lamb who was

slain has be - gun his reign. Al - le - lu - ia.

Final refrain

This is the feast of vic - to - ry for our God.

Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

GREETING AND PRAYER OF THE DAY:

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit are with you all.

And also with you.

Then let's pray: Lord Jesus, good Shepherd of the sheep,
You seek the lost and guide us into Your fold.

Feed us, and we'll be satisfied; heal us, and we'll be whole.

Make us one with You, for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

Amen.

WORD

PREPARATION FOR THE WORD:

*Pr Dave will introduce this song to us;
then we'll sing it together once or twice to let the tune (and the promise) sink in...*

***Behold, behold—I make all things new, beginning with you and starting from today.
Behold, behold—I make all things new; My promise is true, for I am Christ the Way!***

FIRST READING:

Acts 4.1-12

NRSVUE

After Peter and John had healed a lame man at the Temple, and while they were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came to them, ² much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there's the resurrection of the dead. ³ So they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴ But many of those who heard the word believed, and they numbered about five thousand.

⁵The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, ⁶with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?"

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders,
⁹if we are being questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was
sick and are being asked how this man has been healed, ¹⁰let it be known to all of you,
and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by
the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the
dead. ¹¹This Jesus is ‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become
the cornerstone.’ ¹²There’s salvation in no one else, for there’s no other name under
heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

This is holy wisdom; this is holy word.

Thanks be to God!

SECOND READING:

1 John 3.16-24

NRSVUE

St John writes: We know love by this, that *Christ Jesus* laid down His life for us—and
we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and sisters. ¹⁷How does God’s love
abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and
yet refuses help? ¹⁸Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in deed and
truth. ¹⁹And by this we’ll know that we’re from the truth and will reassure our hearts
before Him ²⁰whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts,
and He knows everything. ²¹Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have
boldness before God, ²²and we receive from Him whatever we ask, because we obey
His commandments and do what pleases Him.

²³And this is His commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus
Christ and love one another, just as He’s commanded us. ²⁴All who obey His
commandments abide in Him, and He abides in them. And by this we know that He
abides in us, by the Spirit that He’s given us.

This is holy wisdom; this is holy word.

Thanks be to God!





You have the words of e - ter - nal life. Al - le - lu - ia.

THE HOLY GOSPEL:

John 10.11-18

NRSVUE

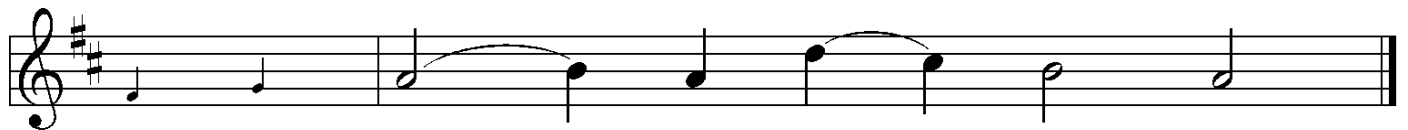
The Holy Gospel according to St John, the tenth chapter.



Glo - ry to you, O Lord.

*Jesus said to a group of Pharisees as well as His disciples, "I'm the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand, who's not the shepherd and doesn't own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand doesn't care for the sheep. ¹⁴I'm the **good** shepherd. I know My own, and My own know Me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father. And I lay down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that don't belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they'll listen to My voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I've received this command from My Father."*

This is the Gospel of our Lord.



Praise to you, O Christ.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOOD NEWS

HYMN OF THE DAY: "The King of Love My Shepherd Is" *ELW 502*



1 The King of love my shep - herd is, whose good - ness
2 Where streams of liv - ing wa - ter flow, my ran - somed
3 Per - verse and fool - ish oft I strayed, but yet in
4 In death's dark vale I fear no ill, with thee, dear



fail - eth nev - er; I noth - ing lack if
soul he lead - eth and, where the ver - dant
love he sought me, and on his shoul - der
Lord, be - side me, thy rod and staff my



I am his and he is mine for - ev - er.
pas - tures grow, with food ce - les - tial feed - eth.
gent - ly laid, and home, re - joic - ing, brought me.
com - fort still; thy cross be - fore to guide me.

5 Thou spreadst a table in my sight;
thine unction grace bestoweth;
and, oh, what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!

6 And so, through all the length of days,
thy goodness faileth never.
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house forever.

HOLY BAPTISM

INTRODUCTION AND PRESENTATION:

In Holy Baptism our gracious heavenly Father liberates us from sin and death by joining us to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We're born children of a fallen humanity; in the waters of Baptism, we're reborn children of God and heirs of eternal life. By water and the Holy Spirit, we're made members of the Church which is the body of Christ. As we live with Christ and with His people, we grow in faith, love, and obedience to the will of God.

I present Olivia Celeste Pugliese to receive the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

In Christian love you've presented this child for Holy Baptism. You should, therefore, faithfully bring her to the services of God's house and teach her the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments. As she grows in years, you should place in her hands the Holy Scriptures and provide for her instruction in the Christian faith, that living in the covenant of her Baptism and in communion with the Church, she may lead a godly life until the day of Jesus Christ. Do you promise to fulfill these obligations?

We do.

And people of God, do you promise to support Olivia and pray for her in her new life in Christ?

We do.

RENUNCIATION OF EVIL, CONFESSION OF FAITH:

Then let's together profess our faith in Christ Jesus, reject sin, and confess the faith of the Church, the faith in which we baptize:

Do you renounce the Devil and all the forces that defy God?

I do.

Do you renounce the powers of this world that rebel against God?

I do.

Do you renounce the ways of sin that draw you away from God?

I do.

Do you believe in God the Father?

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.



***He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell. On the third day He rose again.
He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.***

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

***I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.***

PRAYERS FOR OURSELVES AND OTHERS:

Then let's pray: Lord of the Church, help us to give You all that belongs to You.

Make us faithful stewards of our time, talents, and treasures.

Lord of creation, help us to share our bounties.

***Plant in us the will and desire
to use the world's resources wisely and without bias.***

Lord of the nations, help us to put aside malice.

***Teach us to fight for justice, to liberate the oppressed,
and to speak up for those who have no voice.***

Lord of all, help us to support one another.

***Bless our communities, sustain our local businesses,
and remove the walls that separate us from one another.***

Lord of life, help us in our brokenness and need.

***Restore the minds, bodies, and spirits of those who are sick,
and comfort those in despair.***

Lord of the resurrection, help us rejoice in Your promises.

***Revive the hearts of those who grieve,
and greet those who are dying with Your renewing grace.***

Hear our prayers for our brothers and sisters

whose needs especially weigh on our hearts today:

Those in need may be remembered in prayer either silently or aloud.

BAPTISMAL THANKSGIVING:

Holy God, mighty Lord, gracious Father! We give You thanks, for in the beginning Your Spirit moved over the waters and You created heaven and earth. By the gift of water, You nourish and sustain us with all living things. By the waters of the flood, You condemned the wicked and saved those whom You'd chosen, Noah and his family. You led Israel by the pillar of cloud and fire through the sea, out of slavery into the freedom of the land of Your promise. In the waters of the Jordan, Your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Spirit. By the baptism of His own death and resurrection, Your beloved Son has set us free from our slavery to sin and death, opening the way to the joy and freedom of everlasting life. He made water a sign of the Kingdom and of cleansing and rebirth. In obedience to His command, we make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Now pour out Your Holy Spirit, so that Olivia may be given new life in this Holy Baptism. Wash away her sin as she's cleansed by this water, and bring her forth as an heir of Your glorious Kingdom. And to You be given praise and honor and glory through Your Son, Christ Jesus our Lord, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever! *Amen.*

BATH, ANOINTING, AND SIGNING WITH THE CROSS:

Olivia Celeste, I baptize you
in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we give You thanks for freeing Your sons and daughters from the power of sin and for raising them up to a new life through this holy sacrament. Now pour out Your Holy Spirit upon *N.*: the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the Spirit of joy in Your presence. *Amen.*

N.N., child of God, you've been sealed by the Holy Spirit
and marked with the cross of Christ forever. *Amen.*

PRESENTATION OF BAPTISMAL CANDLE

Jesus said, "I'm the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." In the same way, Jesus says, "You're the light of the world. Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

PRAYER AND WELCOME

Let's pray: God, the giver of all life, look with kindness upon Cody and Jen, the parents of this child, and upon Keith and Chelsea, her baptismal sponsors. Let them ever rejoice in the gift you've given them. Make them teachers and examples of righteousness for this child. Strengthen them in their own Baptism, so that they may share eternally with their children the salvation you've given them, through Christ Jesus our Lord. *Amen.*

Through Holy Baptism God has made this new sister a member of the priesthood we all share in Christ Jesus, that we may proclaim the praise of God and bear His creative and redeeming Word to the world.

*We welcome you into the Lord's family and ours.
We receive you as a fellow member of the body of Christ,
a child of the same heavenly Father,
and a worker with us in the kingdom of God.*

SHARING OF THE PEACE OF CHRIST

The peace of the Lord is with you always. *And also with you.*
Reconciled to God and to one another, we share a sign of Christ's peace.

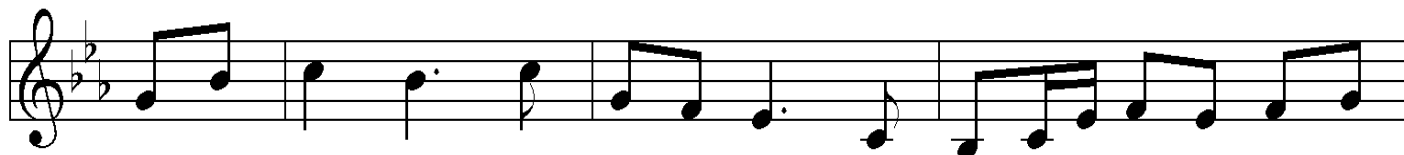
<h2>MEAL</h2>

OFFERING OF OUR GIFTS AND OURSELVES, WITH ANTHEM:

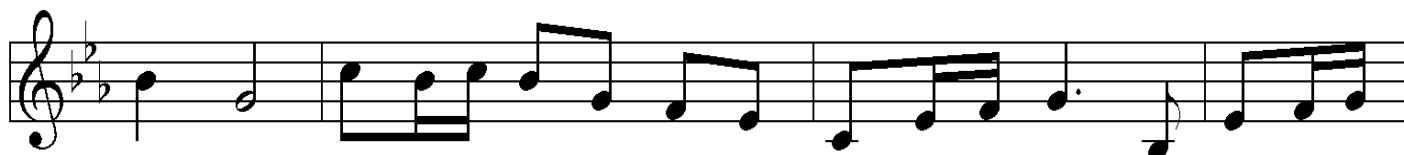
"My Shepherd Will Supply My Need"

-- arr. by Lloyd Larson

OFFERTORY CANTICLE: "Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful"



Let the vine-yards be fruit-ful, Lord, and fill to the brim our cup of



bles-sing. Gath-er a har-vest from the seeds that were sown, that we may be



fed with the bread of life. Gath-er the hopes and dreams of all; u -

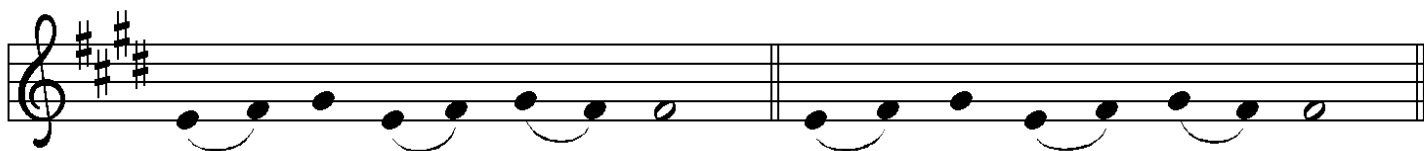


nite them with the prayers we of - fer. Grace our ta - ble with your

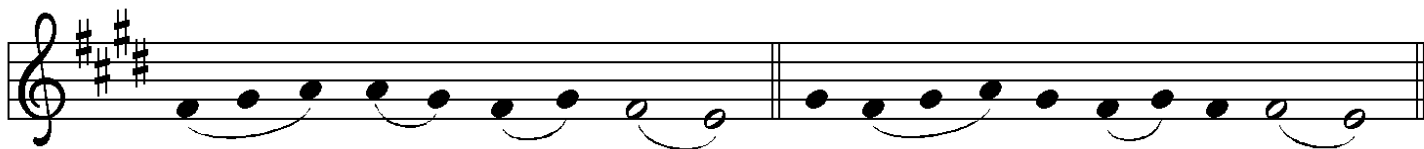


pres - ence, and give us a fore - taste of the feast to come.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER:



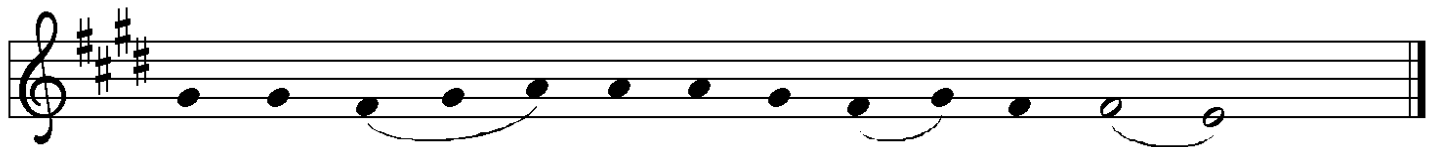
The Lord be with you. And al - so with you.



Lift up your hearts. We lift them to the Lord.

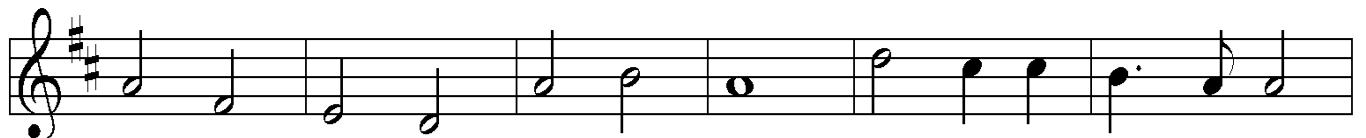


Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.



It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It's indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should always and everywhere give thanks and praise to You, O Lord, holy Father, through Christ Jesus our Lord, who on this day overcame death and the grave, and by His glorious resurrection opened to us the way of everlasting life. And so, with Mary Magdalene and Peter and all the witnesses of the resurrection, with earth and sea and all their creatures, and with angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, we praise your Name and join their unending hymn:



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, Lord God of pow'r and might:



Heav'n and earth are full of your glo - ry.



Ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he who comes



in the name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

In the night in which He was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take and eat. This is My body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of Me." Again after supper He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of Me."

And so, remembering all that our Lord has done for us, believing the witness of His resurrection, awaiting His final appearing in glory, we share this foretaste of the feast to come. Now send Your Holy Spirit upon us, that we may receive our Lord with a living faith as He comes to us in His holy Supper. Empower us by that same Spirit to love and forgive, that our lives may anticipate that day when You'll make all things new. All this we pray with joy through our Lord Jesus Christ, who's taught us to pray:

***Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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.***

Alleluia! Christ Jesus says, "Fear not; I'm the First and the Last, and the Living One. ***I died, and behold, I'm alive forevermore!" Alleluia!***

The risen Christ dwells with us here! All who are hungry, all who are thirsty, come!

CANTICLE: "Lamb of God"



☪ Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on us.



Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on us.



Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the world;



grant us peace, grant us peace.

THE HOLY COMMUNION

*Now we share God's consecrated gifts among God's consecrated people, knowing that our living Lord Jesus is fully present with us in His Supper, giving Himself to us in bread and wine and forgiving love. Today, we'll share the Lord's Supper by receiving the body and blood of Christ at communion "stations" at the altar rail. Come forward a pew at a time; take a glass already filled with grape juice if necessary. Receive **"the body of Christ, given for you"** from the Pastor; then, by dipping the bread into the wine ("intinction") or drinking the grape juice from your glass, receive **"the blood of Christ, shed for you"** from our communion assistant. We'll pause for silent prayer after we've all communed...*

*If you're joining us from your home, we invite you to share the bread and cup with one another. When giving the bread to your neighbor, say **"The body of Christ, given for you."** When giving the wine/grape juice say, **"The blood of Christ, shed for you."** Whatever's left over may be reverently eaten and drunk by everyone after our worship is over. Once we've all shared in the body and blood of Christ, we continue in blessing and prayer:*

SENDING

THANKSGIVING, PRAYER, AND BENEDICTION:

May the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ
Strengthen us and keep us in His grace.

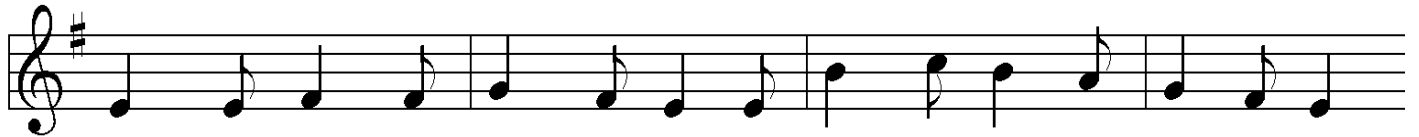
Amen.



☩ Thank the Lord and sing his praise; tell ev-'ry-one what he has done.



Let ev-'ry-one who seeks the Lord re-joice and proud-ly bear his name.



He re-calls his prom-is-es and leads his peo-ple forth in joy



with shouts of thanks-giv-ing. Al-le-lu-ia. Al-le-lu-ia.

Wellspring of joy, through this meal You've put gladness in our hearts.
Satisfy the hunger still around us, and send us as joyful witnesses,
that Your love may bring joy to the hearts of all people
through Christ Jesus our risen Lord.

Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Now may the God of life, who raised Christ Jesus from death,
empower you by the Holy Spirit to walk in newness of life;
and Almighty God, Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever. ***Amen.***

SENDING HYMN: “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us” *ELW 789*

*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 pow’r 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.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND DISMISSAL:

God has a plan.

We’re it!

What’s our part in God’s plan?

Sharing God’s love in joyful service!

Then let’s go in peace, serve in joy, and live out the new life of our risen Lord!

Thanks be to God! Alleluia! Alleluia!

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A Shepherd Who’s Good

One of the many crises of our age has been the crisis of authority. As conflicting news reports, scientific studies, and “expert” voices tell us how to manage the challenges of pandemics, racism, gun violence, global warming, and political deadlock, many of us have grown weary, suspicious, and cynical. Whose guidance and leadership can we trust? Who’ll tell us the truth? Whose voice should we listen for?

In our Gospel reading for this Fourth Sunday in Easter, we see a version of leadership quite different from the ones we’re used to in politics and the media. John describes a leader who “lays down His life” not with words, but with costly actions, a leader who literally places His body in harm’s way for the sake of those He leads. This is a leader with integrity and courage, a leader with skin in the game, a leader who’s self-sacrificially “good.”

If you grew up in the church, you probably learned about this leader— Jesus the Good Shepherd— before you could walk. Maybe there was a painting of a gentle-faced Jesus in your church nursery, an adorable lamb perched on His shoulders. Maybe you made flocks of sheep out of toothpicks, cotton balls, and Elmer’s glue in Sunday School, or had a teacher who moved a felt-and-Sharpie shepherd across a pine green flannelgraph dotted with fleecy lambs. If you’re a preacher’s kid like me, maybe your clergy parent made you sing “I Just Wanna Be a Sheep” until you flinched in embarrassment...

In other words, I don’t think I’m the only one who finds the Good Shepherd passages in John’s Gospel difficult. Though I long for the trustworthy leadership John describes via this metaphor, I’m not sure how to apply a “shepherd” to my 21st-century life. The image is so overfamiliar, its beauty buried under so much saccharine piety and greeting card sentiment, I’m not sure what to do with it. Most of us have no real-life idea what Jesus was talking about when He described the life of faith in terms of shepherds, sheep, hirelings, and wolves. The images we hold in our heads aren’t substantive and gritty; they’re ephemeral and soft, like watercolors.

The thing is, Jesus was an effective teacher because He used metaphors His contemporary audience could relate to. When He spoke of sheepfolds, vineyards, mustard seeds, and fishing nets, He wasn’t spouting exotica; He was wielding the stuff of first-century peasant life. So the problem isn’t Jesus, it’s *me*— I’ve never herded sheep, met a shepherd, or fought a wild predator in my life. But I did grow up visiting my grandparents’ farms in India, and I can tell you this: I never saw my grandfather drape an immaculate baby sheep over his clean, robed shoulders. Most of the time, the animals on his farm stank. Often, at the end of a long day in their midst, so did he. How the Church went from the mud-stained hardships of animal husbandry to a manicured Jesus cuddling a lily-white lamb is beyond me...

So I come to this week’s readings jaded on the one hand, and ignorant on the other. What did Jesus mean when He called Himself the Good Shepherd? In what ways am I like a sheep? What flock do I belong to, and whose voice do I follow most readily? I don’t have answers, but I have questions—

questions that point to an ongoing desire to re-engage and recover this metaphor for my own life. As I read and reread John's Gospel, here are some of those questions:

Why did Jesus use a shepherd metaphor in His time and place? According to the Gospel reading, Jesus had just healed a blind man on the Sabbath, and the religious elite were furious. Moreover, it was the Feast of the Dedication (the holiday we know today as Hanukkah, when Jewish people celebrate the rededication of the Temple after the victory of Judas Maccabeus in 2nd-century BCE), and Jesus was walking in the Temple itself—the very place the Jewish people venerated as representative of their unique, covenantal relationship with God.

Why call Himself a shepherd in that setting? The image of a shepherd tending his or her flock would've been deeply ingrained in the religious imaginations of the Israelites; they had a long history with shepherds. Rachel was a shepherd. Zipporah and her sisters were shepherds. Moses tended sheep before God commissioned him to lead the Israelites out of slavery, and King David started out as a shepherd before ascending to the throne. The Jewish people of Jesus' day knew Yahweh as the ultimate Shepherd over His flock, Israel.

So I wonder if Jesus was saying something provocative rather than self-effacing when he called himself the Good Shepherd. I tend to think "meek and mild" when I imagine Jesus cradling lambs—but why would "meek and mild" so anger Jesus' listeners, who attempted to arrest Him for using this particular metaphor? Was Jesus in fact equating Himself with God, the Shepherd King?

On the very occasion when the Jewish people of His day were celebrating the supremacy of the Temple and its centrality in their religious lives, was Jesus suggesting that God's presence actually dwells in the wilderness, out among the wolves, the thieves, the hirelings, and the smelly sheep? (In other words, among the outcasts, the irreligious, the ritually unclean, and the politically incorrect?) If so, what might this provocative teaching mean for us today? Where's *my* Temple? Where's *my* wilderness? Where are the places I assume God doesn't dwell?

What did Jesus mean when He said, "I know My own and My own know Me?" The line startles me because I'm not convinced that the life of faith is so straightforward, so certain. I'm remembering times in my life when I haven't known for sure who God is or what God desires of me, when I've feared that I'm not Jesus' own. If Jesus is so certain of my identity, so sure that I'm capable of discerning His voice, I wonder what keeps me hanging in doubt and fear.

I think of the barriers that lie between Jesus' assurance and my faith. There are barriers of doctrine. (Do I believe all the right things about God? Do I have my creeds in order? Is there some nuance of theology I'm missing?) There are barriers of guilt. (How can I really be forgiven when I mess up so often? If I belong to the shepherd, why is it so easy to wander away? Surely there must be a catch somewhere.) And there are barriers of pain. (I've cried out for my Shepherd's voice many times, and experienced silence. Or if Jesus has spoken, I haven't recognized Him.)

If the metaphor isn't perfect, or if it leaves much to mystery, can I still find the courage to lean into it? Maybe the "barriers" I've named are of my own making. Maybe what Jesus is saying in this passage is more straightforward and more radical: "You belong. Yes, you do. Yes, you **do**. I know you. You're Mine. Period!"

Who are my modern-day hirelings? In the story Jesus tells, the hired hands are pseudo-shepherds who work for personal gain, not love. They have no stake in the well-being of the sheep; they flee at the first sign of danger. So I wonder: Whose voices do I heed to my detriment? What siren songs call to me, making seductive promises I shouldn't trust? Money? Success? Physical attractiveness? Prestige? Politics? Racial, cultural, or national identity? These are the biggies, easiest to name. What else calls to me, promising a version of love that is ultimately thin, cheap, fragile, and unsafe?

Moreover, if my calling in this life is to work under the auspices of the Master Shepherd, what kind of "hireling" will I be? Will I skip town at the first hint of risk or hardship? Will I use the sheep for my own gain, or will I love them as I love my own skin? What will "laying down my life" look like?

Why has the Church blunted this metaphor? I've heard that sheep are dumb and skittish. I've heard they wander, get hurt easily, graze without ceasing, and bicker for no reason. I've heard they're stubborn, that they long to be led, but resist being driven. So I wonder what Jesus has to put up with, shepherding me. Does He fight loneliness and boredom as I ignore Him in favor of greener pastures? Does He watch the dumb, skittish, stubborn things I do, hoping I won't injure myself yet again? Maybe He rescues me from death all the time, while I, oblivious, resist His efforts tooth and nail.

The more I read John 10, the grittier and more challenging it sounds. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus loves the obstinate and the lost. He lives at the edges of polite society, out in the wild, untamed places of the world. His life remains perpetually in danger. He repeatedly faces the mockery and abandonment of the hirelings, who consider His self-sacrificial vocation absurd. Because He's in it for the long haul, He not only frolics with lambs, but wrestles with wolves. He not only tends the wounds of His beloved rams and ewes; He buries them when their time comes.

No wonder the Church has turned Jesus the Shepherd into a greeting card! It's hard to face the bold, patient, and tenacious leader He really is. It hurts to trade the Hallmark card for the long nights and danger-filled days of a vocation in the muck.

So how will we incarnate the love of this magnificent shepherd? How will we spread His goodness in the wildest of wild places, in the valleys, among the wolves, within the flock He knows and loves? What will it take to recover His fortitude, His courage, His boundless love? On this Fourth Sunday after Easter, we know that Jesus is a shepherd who keeps His promises: He's already laid down His life for his sheep. Now it's our turn. Our Shepherd is calling, and His call is trustworthy. But we're free, as always, to resist; we follow what we belong to. Is it Him?

• *Debie Thomas*