

Sunday Devotion for Martin Luther Church

4th Sunday of Easter
May 3, 2020



A warm welcome to watch this devotion at
<https://youtu.be/eyr5s17lu2Y>

A. GATHERING

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

Words of Welcome

Grace and peace to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

As we continue through the Easter season we come to the day that is sometimes called Good Shepherd Sunday. In our readings we will hear the comforting words of Psalm 23, hear how Jesus describes the relationship between the sheep and the shepherd, and the early church is described to us as a group that prays, eats, and supports each other.



It can be difficult to trust in our shepherd at times like this, where many people feel lonely, or are sick, and have died. What we will hear in today's sermon is that these feelings are normal, these events are part of humanity, and that Jesus experienced them all himself. This doesn't make things easier, but I hope you will hear a word of comfort today, knowing that Christ has defeated death not so that hardship has disappeared, but that you feel comforted and protected by his presence in these trying times.

Prayer of the Day

Let us pray:

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.

Amen.

B. WORD

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

Psalm 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
²He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
³he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.
⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff —
they comfort me.
⁵You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
⁶Surely 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.

First Reading: Acts 2:42-47

A reading from Acts, the 2nd chapter.

⁴²[The baptized] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day 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, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

L: The word of the Lord.

A: **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Reading: John 10:1-10

The Holy Gospel according to John.

[Jesus said:] ¹"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. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he

goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.”⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

P: The gospel of the Lord.
A: **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sermon- Vicar Jordan Smith

In today’s gospel reading John provides for us a mixed message, one that has the listener thinking one thing, and then all of a sudden saying something different. In the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the authors record many of Jesus’ stories as parables. Stories that usually have twist in them that cause the hearer to understand the situation in a different way and hopefully learn something along the way.

John doesn’t record parables. There are two passages that are similar to parables, but you get the idea this is not a form of speech John lists as a favourite. In verse six of chapter 10, John refers to this image of the sheep and the sheepfold as a figure of speech. So something different than a parable, but still using one image to help the listeners think of another.

And yet, the figure of speech quickly gets mixed up. As I read through this passage, I can hear in my head the voice of my almost five-year old daughter telling me a knock-knock joke. The pattern is there, the intention of humour is present, and yet, in the end it falls flat. She doesn’t yet quite understand how the punchline at the end is supposed to relate to the opening parts of the joke. The joke doesn’t work. Now, I still laugh and enjoy the attempt, but the people around Jesus make it very clear that they don’t understand what he is trying to say. Jesus creates this visual image of a sheepfold with one entrance and a gatekeeper who only lets the true shepherds in while keeping the bandits and thieves out. The sheep know his voice and they will follow the shepherd. Jesus has made it clear earlier in John’s Gospel that those who hear him have eternal life. That the dead will hear the voice of the Son and will live. [1]

So we get it, the sheep hear the shepherd, we need to hear Jesus, the figure of speech has been setup and we are ready for the punchline, or explanation, where Jesus makes it clear that his role is that of Shepherd.

Except he doesn’t. Jesus, or John recording the words of Jesus, doesn’t understand the format, doesn’t understand how to tell the knock-knock joke, and suddenly Jesus is claiming he is the gate. The gate. We know the words that the Lord is my shepherd, which certainly sounds more comforting than the Lord is my Gate.

[1] John 5:24-25

Now, next year on this Sunday after Easter we will read the next 9 verses, where Jesus gets back on track and continues to state that along with being the gate, he is also the shepherd. But for today, this is what we have. Jesus has told us about how the ideal sheepfold operates, and he has told us he is the gate.

These first verses of chapter 10 can be better understood if we go back a little bit, to the previous story. In chapter 9, Jesus heals a man who was born blind, and the pharisees investigate the healing because the miracle had happened on the sabbath. After questioning the man and then his parents, the pharisees drove him out, or cast him out. In verse 23 we are told that anyone confessing Jesus as Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue, from the religious community, and now, because of not answering questions in the right way, the healed man is cast out.

So Jesus uses a figure of speech, which while it is directed towards those who are his followers to teach them about being sheep, is mainly directed at the Pharisees, to tell them how they have not cared for the flock. That rather than the religious institution being a safe place where the sheep come to be protected, have turned their religious rules into instruments that cast out people who don't fit the mold.

As the man has been driven out, forgotten, shamed, Jesus says that the shepherd will lead the sheep out. And what a contrast that is. The spiritual leaders who are afraid of losing power, of losing control, drive out the man. Elsewhere in the gospels this word, the Greek word for driving out, is used for casting out demons, for expelling Satan, for Jesus driving the money changers out of the temple, for the stones being cast at Stephen as he is martyred in Acts. John is showing us that this man is being equated with all things that are wrong, that need to be sent out.

And Jesus turns this around. The shepherd does not drive out the sheep from the sheepfold, but leads them, brings them forth – another translation says to carry out. The sheep are led, described in the same way that this word is used in Acts, when the story of the Exodus is retold, or of Peter being freed from prison, or of Jesus leading the disciples to their blessing before the ascension. The sheep, like the man who was healed, are led to freedom, led to deliverance.

So we have this contrast, between the pharisees who drive out someone, and the shepherd who leads, or carries, out the sheep.

And yet these words carry more weight as we explore them further. Because it's not just the healed man who is driven out – it's Jesus as well. Jesus is driven by the spirit into the desert to be tempted, Jesus is driven out of Nazareth by people who don't accept him. Like the blind man who sees, Jesus understands the rejection of being driven out, because he himself has been rejected.

But, being led, the positive aspect of the shepherd, isn't all glory. Because while the people are led to freedom, as they are led to blessings, Jesus is also led to the cross. He has been driven out, the negative word, and felt rejection, but he has also been led, the positive word, to his crucifixion.

Words are confusing and difficult. They can be positive one moment, and then bring about darkness the next. They can carry unexpected meaning, that like John's figure of speech, might not make sense at first, but as we dig deeper, we sense their immense power. In John chapter 10, verses 1-10, Jesus defines his ministry not using the expectations of others, but through his own images. He is the shepherd come to lead the sheep, but he is also the gate, defining the path through which people will experience the messiah.

And through him, through his gate, we the sheep go in and out, and find pasture. Trusting in his words that because he was led to the cross we "may have life, and have it abundantly." And so we are led, to life, not a life free from challenge, or hardship or danger, but led by a shepherd who is with us, who knows us, who calls us by name. And when danger presents itself, we may hear the words of Psalm 23, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me – the tools used to beat back the danger. The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing, because the evil forces can not win over my life, because my shepherd leads and protects. There is a story that tells of Martin Luther being tempted by the devil and his response being "I am baptized!" In our baptism, in our journey with Christ, we are protected by the shepherd who leads, and by the gate that keeps us safe in the sheepfold.

As we go about our weeks ahead, in the rest of this Easter season, think about how you will be led, how you will be carried. Be led by a shepherd who cares and protects, be a shepherd, on the lookout for those you can carry, those who have been cast out and rejected, knowing that the strength for this comes from being carried yourself, by others in our community, and by Jesus himself, the one who experienced rejection so that we may have life. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

O God,
Your son remained with his disciples after his resurrection,
Teaching them to love all people as neighbours.
As his disciples in this age,
We offer our prayers on behalf of the universe
In which we are privileged to live
And our neighbours with whom we share it.

Creating 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. 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. Guide our leaders in their response to pandemic, that they make wise decisions in their responsibility to care for all people.
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.
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 congregations and area including the Wesley Mimico Foodbank, Christ Church St. James Foodbank, and the newly planned seed and garden program at Martin Luther and Redeemer. May none of our neighbors lack for basic needs.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lifegiving God, you are with us on every day of our lives. Be with those who have celebrated their birthdays this week and may they feel your guiding presence. We remember all who are celebrating birthdays this week, including Florine, Asta Marie, Lukas, and Gerta.
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. We pray especially for those who have died this week from COVID, that their loneliness in death has been met with your comforting presence.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Open our hearts to your power moving
Around us and between us and within us,
Until your glory is revealed in our love of both friend and enemy,
In communities transformed by justice and compassion,
And in the healing of all that is broken.

Amen.

C. SENDING

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

Blessing

May the One who brought forth Jesus from the dead
raise you to new life, fill you with hope,
and turn your mourning into dancing.

Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
bless you now and forever.

Amen.

Dismissal

Christ is risen, just as he said.
Go in peace. Share the good news. Alleluia!

Thanks be to God. Alleluia!

Announcements

In light of the current COVID-19 outbreak, **all meetings and worship services are taking place virtually.**

- Sunday [Video Devotions](#) are on our [YouTube Channel](#). Please subscribe and comment on our videos.
- German [Radio Devotions](#) on our website and on Sundays at 9.30 am live on CHLO Radio AM 530
- [Virtual Sunday Coffee Hour](#) at 11:00 am through Zoom
- [Sunday School lessons](#) on our website
- [Virtual Coffee Shop Talk](#), Mondays 7:00-9:00 pm through Zoom led by Vicar Silke Fahl
- [Virtual Prayer Circle](#), Wednesdays 5:30-6:00 pm through Zoom led by Solveig Christina Voss; we also have a Prayer Request Wall in the Church Foyer
To request a prayer or join our prayer circle, email prayers@martinluther.ca.
- Corona-Care Calls- Volunteers are continuing to call you with more information and to understand your needs. Please provide us with your emergency contact person. Also, please share our information with this person to ensure we are able to help you.
Let us know if you'd like to join the call team!
- Virtual Dinner Church by the Lake through Zoom, May 13 at 7:00 pm
- Ascension of our Lord / Christihimmelfahrt, May 21:
11:00 am German-language virtual reflection, prayer and conversation through Zoom led by Pastor Katharina Moeller (St. George's Church) and Pastor Ralph Carl (First Lutheran Church). Call 647- 558-0588 and enter 401 273 968 (Meeting ID)
5:30 pm Virtual Evening Prayer in English through Zoom hosted by Firth Lutheran Church
- Please phone or email the church office:
 - ◇ if we can help you in any way
 - ◇ if you'd like to volunteer by yourself or with people you are isolated with.
Spring clean the church building, backyard and garden at 5 Superior or come up with ideas for how to help your neighbours and MLC.
 - ◇ with feedback on what we're offering
 - ◇ to support our church and [donate](#)

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