



St. Andrew's United Church of Christ

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FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 3, 2020

10:00 A.M.



Dear Friends in Christ,

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Easter continues as we celebrate the hope of resurrection on this Fourth Sunday in Easter, commonly called “Good Shepherd” or “Shepherd” Sunday.

Jesus calls himself, “the Good Shepherd,” one who is willing to lay down his life for the sheep. We belong to Christ, he owns us, embraces us, and promises to care for us in all circumstances.

I continue to miss being present with you in worship and look forward to the time when we will be able to gather again, both around the Word and the Lord's Table, as today is a Communion Sunday. Included in this Bulletin, are links to YouTube Hymns and for the very first time, in my 45 years of ministry, a link to a video sermon illustration. Let's hope it works! While nothing substitutes for corporate worship, it's my hope that in this modest approach, worship of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit still occurs.

Peace and Prayers

In Christ,

Pastor Bigelow

Silent Prayer for the Beginning of Worship — Almighty God, you sent Jesus, our Good Shepherd, to gather us together. May we not wander from his flock, but follow wherever he leads, listening for his voice and staying near to him until we are safely in your fold to live with you forever. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

WE GATHER TO WORSHIP THE TRIUNE GOD

CALL TO WORSHIP

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

May our lives profess and proclaim that “our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.” (Psalm 124:8)

Amen!

O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker!

For he is our God,

and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. (Psalm 95:6-7)

SALUTATION

“Grace to you and peace from the One who is and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.” Alleluia,

Amen! (Revelation 1:4-5)

GATHERING HYMN — [*The Strife Is O'er; the Battle Done*](#)

OPENING PRAYER

We thank you Lord, for this opportunity of Christian worship and praise. As we worship this Easter season, shape us by your Spirit. Make us right with you, that we might be aligned with your purpose and love.

Help to love the things that you love and the things that you want, so that we may walk in paths of righteousness and our hearts may be open to love those people you have placed in our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WE ARE RENEWED BY THE SPIRIT

CALL TO CONFESSION

If your sins have left you feeling alienated from God, others, and even your best self, confess those sins and God will stand ready to welcome you home, and make you feel at home again with yourself, with your family, friends and with your God. Let us confess our sins before God.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord God, our shepherd, you gather us as lambs, carrying us with your all embracing love. Yet like sheep, we wander from you. We nibble our way lost; we go from one tuft of grass to another until we end up far away in a place we never imagined or intended.

(silent reflection)

Refresh us once again by your quiet waters of mercy and restore our souls by your searching and redeeming love. Guide our paths that we may follow you more closely. We pray this through Jesus our Lord and Shepherd. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE AND FORGIVENESS

Hear the Good News of the Gospel. Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us; Christ reigns in power; Christ prays for us. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation, the old is gone; and a new life has begun. Know that you are forgiven and be at peace!!!

GOD'S DIRECTION FOR OUR LIVES

Psalm 1

WE HEAR AND LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Old Testament—Psalm 23

New Testament — John 10:1-15

SERMON – *Where is the Good Shepherd?* (at end of bulletin)

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Christ has died,

Christ is risen,

Christ will come again.

HYMN OF RESPONSE

[The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want](#)

WE GO FORTH TO REVEAL JESUS CHRIST IN THE WORLD

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

Lord, we thank you for the celebrations and delights that you have given us as we go throughout life. Make us people who are far from dull; give us a sense of lightness; fill our days with laughter; kindness and a healthy sense of play, work, and worship.

Life is tough, Lord; you are the Rock of our salvation, and today we need a Gibraltar to hang on to, because the tragedies of these past months have been overwhelming and make us wonder where life is going. Our prayers surround those who are dying in an isolated ICU and those who have had to let go of them from a painful distance. Other losses are piling up, too, loss of employment, income, routines...be a rock of comfort to all in this time of sadness and loss.

Uphold those who work tirelessly to minister to those in body and soul. When and where they are weary, give them courage, strength and patience to keep on going. Walk with those who are spiritually tired and physically worn out. Stand with those who experience the unprecedented uncertainties of aging and live alone or are forgotten and with those who are imprisoned and live in dangerous circumstances.

We pray for those in the circle of love and friendship around us; our families, children and parents, sisters and brothers, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, friends and neighbors, for all those who are especially in our thoughts, whether they are near or far.

Give to each of us, not what we want, but what we need, O God. Use us as instruments in your service. For we offer these prayers in the name of Christ our Lord who taught us to pray:

***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 debts,
as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory forever. Amen.***

BENEDICTION

May the grace and peace of Christ that passes all understanding be with you now and forever. Amen.

SERMON – *Where is the Good Shepherd?*

Scripture: Old Testament—Psalm 23

New Testament — John 10:1-15

Today is that Sunday in Eastertide traditionally known as “Shepherd’s Sunday,” in which the assigned lectionary text in one way or another, contains the image of a sheep and shepherd. Scripture compares Jesus to a shepherd, a very good shepherd and compares us as sheep.

“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” Why didn’t Jesus say, “I am the great teacher, you are my brilliant students. You students can do anything you put your minds to...study hard.” Or “I am the great CEO in the front office, you are my second level managers out on the floor, go out and be busy.”

What Jesus said is that I am the loving, searching, seeking, self-sacrificing shepherd and you are the sheep. This is a good image of a shepherd but creates a problem for us. It is great to hear Jesus say that he is the shepherd that lays down his life for sheep, but that also means we must say that we are sheep. Perhaps you have seen pastoral paintings with pictures of sheep gently grazing in the country side with flowers and mountains in the background. I know members who have raised sheep on their farms and have quite a different view of these gentle animals. Sheep are often very dirty with their own amazing smell. In addition, sheep are inadequate to handle life and incapable of making proper choices. They will often follow the first “thing” that comes across their path and can be so short sighted that they are likely to walk off a cliff, unless a person stands right there and directs them in another direction.

We look at sheep and say, but that can’t be us. We are sophisticated people, people who have come of age. A car today has more horse power than a medieval army. Our computers make computations in seconds that would take years for mathematicians to accomplish. We have telescopes that can see well past the Milky Way and locate thousands more galaxies. What do you mean, we are sheep?

Take off all those fancy clothes and beautiful trappings and just take a look at ourselves, and when we really look, we are forced to admit, if only occasionally that there are things about us that are quite offensive to God.

We know that we are inadequate to handle everything that comes our way because we make mistakes. We know that we are incapable of choosing the right path, because we keep finding ourselves on the wrong one. We know that we are short-sighted enough to forget that there

are consequences to some of the things we do, and so we get into trouble; over, and over, and over again. Our proud arrogance and stubborn conviction that we are independent and capable just doesn't add up. A lesson that Covid-19 is teaching us, is that our realities are padded and cover over just how fragile we and our routines are. We are sheepish!

The encouraging part is that not only are we sheep, but we have a shepherd. This week on a Yahoo News segment, there was a story and video that came from Nevada where a flock of sheep escaped their pen and were running through a small town and into residents' backyards. It was absolutely hilarious. [Click here to view the video.](#)

yahoo!
news



When the sheep are rampaging through the town, one can hear a person ask, “where’s the shepherd”? That was a great question and image of sheep without a shepherd. It gives us a picture of a life without shepherd.

It is easy for us to get lost today and follow just about anything that comes along. It is easy to become lost in a world that is too big. Corporations are too big, the universities are too big, government is too big, the future is too big, and the world is too big!!! The sea is so big, and our boat is so small. There are thousands of self-help books out there, that will offer a 7-step solution to a better and healthier life; try this diet; follow these exercises and all will be well. We are looking for and need a shepherd.

The Good News is that we are sheep with a shepherd! Jesus is our good shepherd, he can and will meet our needs. He sees our needs before we know that they are even there and brings healing and hope to our hearts. So, look at who our Shepherd is. If you are living in the shadows of life, you don't have to anymore. If you are tangled in a web of selfish choices, there is another

alternative. If you are lost in a fog of stubborn pride, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, can guide and lead you; “and the sheep hear his voice; He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all of his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.” (John 10:3b,4)

God might be beyond our reach, but we are not beyond his! God is Jesus the Good Shepherd; the one reaching out to us; the one who lays down his life for a bunch of wayward, stubborn and stinky, sheep. All that we wayward and lost sheep know for sure is that, “the Lord is my shepherd, he makes me lie down, he leads me, he comforts me, prepares a table for me, anoints me, with goodness and mercy.

This is not in our searching or where we end up, it is where we begin. This is where our baptism begins.

We love God, but God first loved us.

While we were yet helpless, in the fullness of time, Christ died for the ungodly.

God showed his love for us while we were yet sinners; Christ died for us.

What is your only comfort in life and death? That I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

The catechism puts it at the beginning and not at the end. It’s the start and once this is established, the rest falls into place. Grace, love and redemption are not dangled at the end as lures; but they are at the start.

We are sheep, needy, helpless, wayward sheep, but we have a Shepherd to whom we belong. At many levels we are asking the question of “What are we going to do”? How are we going to respond to this new normal? Thank God that we have a really, really Good Shepherd, who owns you, is going to stick with you, love you forever and die trying. Amen.

Let us pray.

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, we thank you for your continuing, sustaining, providential care of us. In all circumstances and challenges in life you lead, guide and guard us. Help us to hear your voice, calling us by name to commit ourselves more faithfully to follow you, that we might be led in the path of eternal life. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.