



FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 3, 2020

We are still the body of Christ even though we are unable to gather for public worship during this time of world-wide crisis. While we cannot be together in person around our Lord's Table, we can hear the word of God and hold each other in prayer.

Today is traditionally called "Good Shepherd Sunday." Jesus of Nazareth 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 comes to us in the waters of Holy Baptism. Each week, he spreads the feast of his word before us in the midst of the world's violence and war. We go forth to be signs of the resurrection and extend God's tender care to all creation.

Prelude

Canzonetta in G Major

Dieterich Buxtehude

Hymn

Hallelujah! Jesus Lives!



1 Hal - le - lu - jah! Je - sus lives! He is now the Liv - ing One;
2 Je - sus lives! Why do you weep? Why that sad and mourn - ful sigh?
3 Je - sus lives! And thus, my soul, life e - ter - nal waits for you;
4 Je - sus lives! Let all re - joice. Praise him, ran - somed of the earth.
5 Hal - le - lu - jah! An - gels, sing! Join with us in hymns of praise.



from the gloom - y halls of death Christ, the con - quer - or, has gone,
He who died our broth - er here lives our broth - er still on high,
joined to him, your liv - ing head, where he is, you shall be too;
Praise him in a no - bler song, cher - u - bim of heav'n - ly birth.
Let your cho - rus swell the strain which our fee - bler voic - es raise:



bright fore - run - ner to the skies of his peo - ple, yet to rise.
lives for - ev - er to be - stow bless - ings on his church be - low.
with the Lord, at his right hand, as a vic - tor you shall stand.
Praise the vic - tor king, whose sway sin and death and hell o - bey.
glo - ry to our God a - bove and on earth his peace and love!

Text: Carl B. Garve, 1763–1841; tr. Jane Borthwick, 1813–1897, alt.
Music: FRED TIL BOD, Ludvig M. Lindeman, 1812–1887

Easter Acclamation and Apostolic Greeting

Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

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

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 Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

WE GATHER AROUND THE WORD AND PRAYERS

First Lesson - Acts 2:42–47

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 upon God's people. This new community is founded on the teachings of the apostles and sustained in the breaking of the bread.

⁴²The baptized devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

⁴³All 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.

Psalm 23

The Lord is shepherd and guide. God is present in the time of danger and is generous and merciful.

The LORD is my shepherd;

I shall not be in want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures
and leads me beside still waters.

³He revives my soul
and guides me along right pathways for his name's sake.

⁴Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

⁵You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me;
you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup is running over.

⁶Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Second Lesson - 1 Peter 2:19–25

Doing the right things does not guarantee that one will not experience difficulties, hardships, rejection, or even suffering. Here, Jesus the Christ is presented as the model for our path of endurance and loyalty to God, particularly in the midst of adversity.

¹⁹It is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. ²⁰If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. ²¹For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

²²"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."

²³When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. ²⁴He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

²⁵For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Holy Gospel - John 10:1–10

Jesus of Nazareth is portrayed metaphorically as both the shepherd in charge of the sheep and then the gate through which the sheep enter. He knows his sheep by name. They hear his voice and find the fullness of life.



Jesus said: "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." ⁶Jesus 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."

Sermon

A mixed metaphor is an accidental, tongue-twisted, haphazard juxtaposition of images likely to be more comical or perplexing than revealing, such as: "not the sharpest cookie in the jar"; or, "you can take that to the bank and smoke it"; or, "a watched clock never boils"; or, "more fun than a barrel of laughs"; or, "she lived her life like a candle at both ends"; or, "don't cry over spilled beans"; or, "it was like the tip of the iceberg that broke the camel's back."

Our gospel reading for this Fourth Sunday of Easter includes some challenging images and metaphors, which are certainly **shifting metaphors** – even if not mixed. The author of the gospel according to John portrays Jesus of Nazareth **shifting metaphors** because his audience isn't following his line of reasoning. First, Jesus contrasts the good, loving **shepherd** who enters the sheepfold by the gate and calls his sheep by name – he contrasts that shepherd to a thief or bandit who climbs in by another way to steal, kill, or destroy the sheep. It certainly seems clear enough that a shepherd is preferable to a thief or bandit but, as Voltaire said some seventeen centuries later, "Common sense is not so common."

Jesus perceives that using the word "shepherd" as a metaphorical figure of speech is not working with his audience, that those gathered don't understand what he's trying to communicate, so he **shifts** to another metaphor, proclaiming, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the **gate** for the sheep. . . Whoever enters by

me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. . . I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

The gospel writer uses these shifting metaphors to make the point to his community of late-first-century followers of the risen Lord that Jesus the Christ is the one who offers abundant life and seeks the good of his sheep. These are meant to be supportive, sustaining, comforting words to a beleaguered band of followers who, on the one hand, are persecuted by the Romans and, on the other, have been expelled from the Jewish worshiping community. They are uprooted and adrift in a threatening world, which makes these words about the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep and who provides protection and sustenance for them so very powerful. The message is clear that they are not suffering in vain because they follow “The Way” of the Christ. They will not merely ‘get through’ the difficult, displaced, challenging times in which they are living. They will experience life and joy to the fullest – life in all its abundance.

Of course, that word “abundance” needs interpretation. Living as we do in a consumer culture that bombards us with non-stop messaging that our identity and worth are defined by what we buy or have or eat or drink or wear or drive or where we live or travel, the temptation is always there to understand “abundance” only in materialistic terms. However, “abundance” has a spiritual dimension that’s not about “stuff” at all (and certainly not about God wanting us to have a big car or private jet – an all-too-common, prosperity-gospel perversion of Jesus’ promise of abundance). “Abundance” is about inner peace and aligning our values with God’s values.

Many are the tempting voices of ‘thieves and bandits’ in our world, leading us astray, encouraging us to put ourselves first. In a recent *New York Times* Opinion piece, Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Viet Thanh Nguyen wrote, “The biological virus afflicting individuals is also a social virus,” with symptoms of “inequality, callousness, selfishness and a profit motive that undervalues human life and overvalues commodities.” He then raises the question: “Will we accept a world of division and scarcity, where we must fight over insufficient resources and opportunities, or imagine a future when our society is measured by how well it takes care of the ill, the poor, the aged and the different?” While Jesus expresses confidence that his sheep know his voice and follow him, that they will not follow anyone but their shepherd, we know all too well that we, like sheep, **DO** go astray, we **DO** fall short of God’s vision for us as God’s beloved children.

The good news is that our loving God through Christ Jesus calls us by name in the waters of Holy Baptism, making us God’s own. We are sheep of God’s own fold, lambs of God’s own flock, and sinners of God’s own redeeming. However, to **shift the metaphors** a bit: we are not only ‘sheep’ who enjoy God’s care, but also ‘shepherds’ or ‘gatekeepers’ who help care for the ‘sheep’ of the world by guiding them to life-giving pastures. By God’s grace, we are called into **community**, into life that is shared with others, which calls us to be aware of what is happening in the world around us. We are connected to the poor, the sick, the refugee, and the oppressed. As followers of the crucified and risen Christ, we are – in our own, multi-gifted ways – empowered by God’s Spirit to share God’s love and compassion and resources to change the world. We seek to serve the most vulnerable among us, setting them free from ‘thieves and bandits’ who prey upon them. We seek a better world in which **ALL** are secure, **ALL** are provided for, and **ALL** are included in the community of humanity. This interconnectedness opens us – and gives witness – to the reality of the resurrection.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, we give thanks for the abundant life our Lord makes possible through his sacrifice, care, and protection. Because of his grace, we can therefore respond with trust, obedience, and faithfulness in our love of God and neighbor. This message was certainly good news to a besieged community of Christ-followers in the first century, just as it is still good news to those of us who are fear-filled and uncertain about our future in this twenty-first century. May we keep in mind the resoundingly clear and comforting proclamation of the Apostle Paul that “nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” – not hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword, to which we might add, or disease or pandemic. “No,” wrote Paul, “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

Today, our risen Lord is **WITH** us and **FOR** us as he meets us in his word and in the community of his Church, even as we are apart one from another in these times. Will we hear the voice of our Good

Shepherd and respond to his call to care for one another, to care for the world God so loves? Or, will we see our society crawling its way back to its pre-existing condition once we reach the other side of our current crisis? May we **listen** to his voice and **enter** into the abundant life he comes to give us. Amen

Hymn of the Day

The King of Love My Shepherd Is

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of three systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The lyrics are as follows:

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.

The Prayers

Penned up in our homes but united in the one flock of believers, we pray for the Church, the earth, the world, and all in need.

For the Church, O God, we pray: that we will hear and follow your voice calling to us in the word; that congregations be upheld in these uncertain times; that we be blessed to continue our mission and ministry in the community and the world.

For the earth, we pray: that lands and waters be renewed; that animals and plants enjoy safe growth; that rain and soil nurture the fields; that we care for all your creation.

For the nations of the world, we pray: that heads of state and legislators cooperate for the good of all; that medical experts be heeded; that government monies serve the nations' greatest needs.

For a world so economically divided, we pray: that we work to see that the millions of those unemployed have food and shelter now and jobs in the future; that children find a fruitful means of education; that refugees be safeguarded from violence and prejudice; that, inspired by the early followers of the risen Christ, those who have means become ever more generous to those who endure great want.

For all in need, we pray: that the sick be healed; that those in despair find hope; that those who are lonely or grieving be comforted; that first responders and medical workers be safeguarded.

For our own desires, we pray: that we will be blessed for the fulfilling of our tasks and individual ministries, and that you hear the cries of our hearts.

silence for reflection and prayer

We praise you for those who have died in the faith that, at our end, as sheep of your own fold, as lambs of your own flock, we will be gathered into your mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Into your everlasting arms we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your care for us, through Jesus Christ, our shepherd, guardian, and friend. Amen

WE WORSHIP WITH OUR OFFERINGS

The needs of Holy Trinity's mission and ministry are ongoing during these times of upheaval and turmoil. Many of our outreach ministry partnerships are facing increased requests for services. May we be faithful and generous as we support our mission "to care actively in the name of Jesus Christ."

Offerings may be mailed to the church or dropped off at the church office.

You are also encouraged to use the online giving portal on our website.

Go to www.holytrinitylynchburg.org and click on "Give."

You may also download the "GivePlus Church" app for your smart phone from Apple or Google.

Offertory Prayer

Merciful Father, we offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us – our selves, our time, and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of him who offered himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. 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*

Blessing

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

Easter Acclamation and Dismissal

Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!
Our service now begins. Go in peace. Serve the risen Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Postlude

Canzonetta in A minor

Dieterich Buxtehude



The altar flowers are given to the glory of God
in loving memory of Maureen K. (Luther) Smith;
and, in gratitude for the ministry of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
by Walter R. Smith and family.

The candles are given to the glory of God by Deb Serio
in honor of Ruth and Bill Belcher's fifty-eighth wedding anniversary.



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**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Lynchburg, Virginia**

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