

## 4th Sunday Easter B 18

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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.  
Amen.

The fourth Sunday of Easter is always designated as 'Good Shepherd' Sunday. I am not sure why they have done this, but it is the case each year. Yet reflecting on shepherds as care takers of the sheep, in many ways so that their sheep may have abundant food and water, they are also keepers of the land which fits with this being Earth day. Here on this day as we contemplate the blessings we receive from God's creation so that we might have sufficient resources for life in this place. We are reminded that we should be aware of how the earth's resources are used. In addition we should also be aware of how we use them affects the world around us as we seek to leave a healthy and prosperous planet for the generations to follow.

This Sunday as well is a Sunday filled with images which I find helpful as a pastor and leader in the church as well as for the way I seek to live my life. There are characteristics of what it means to live a faithful life, to live faithfully loving and caring for others in the world. At the same time Jesus also challenges us to think differently about what it means to be a shepherd, a leader in the world and how we live out our faith in the world.

In order to understand Jesus calling us to be shepherds, to care and love others and the world around us we might need to understand why Jesus is speaking in this manner. Since Easter we have heard accounts of the resurrected Jesus making himself known to his disciples and followers. Jesus returns to remind them of all the things he told them and all the scripture which foretold of his suffering and death and his rising in three days.

But here as Jesus talks about being the Good Shepherd, we are once again pre-crucifixion, before his suffering and death on the cross with Jesus healing and teaching the crowds in the Temple. A crisis arose in the prior chapter as

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Jesus heals a man who was born blind. Upon seeing the man the disciples ask Jesus; 'who sinned this man or his parents?' Jesus responds saying; 'neither, he was born so that God's work might be revealed in him.' Then Jesus heals the man. Suddenly the discussion turns from giving glory to God to how was Jesus able to do this thing nobody has done before. The religious leaders begin to question by what authority or by what power Jesus is able to accomplish this. They then accuse Jesus of healing this man by the power of the devil.

They come to this conclusion because healing a man born blind was something nobody had ever done. Also by challenging the notion that his blindness was caused by his or his parents sin Jesus caused a crisis of faith and questioned accepted teaching about sin and its effects. After all if the religious leaders could not comfortably fit Jesus' actions in to the neat little box they had made for God to exist in, then they declared it a work of the devil.

To which Jesus replies with a long discourse about sheep and gates, hired men and true shepherds of the flock. Our reading is the middle section of a longer teaching by Jesus about what leading and caring for the flock, of who is in and who is out, who ultimately makes that determination and what it means to live life faithfully and abundantly.

Jesus uses the image of a shepherd, an image known to the people of his day in a couple of ways. First there were a great number of shepherds caring for large flocks of sheep in the land outside the city. Many of the people would have had some connection to shepherds and understood the reality when Jesus compared the shepherds to the hired hands.

Secondly the image of shepherd was one for the king over Israel, like that of David. But also the image was pointed at the religious leaders who saw

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themselves in this role of shepherding the flock of members of the church.

So in some way Jesus was challenging them in return for their not believing and not understanding who he is in light of his healing of the man born blind.

In the verses just prior to our reading Jesus makes a point of comparison that I see as central to his whole discourse of being the Good Shepherds. Jesus explaining there are thieves who only come around to break in and steal in contrast to the shepherd who leads them in and out of the gate, leading them to good pastures. Then he says; 'thieves only come to steal and kill and destroy, I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.' Here Jesus makes a promise to those who are of his flock will have abundant life.

So the question might be what constitutes an abundant life or maybe more importantly what keeps us from living an abundant life? Often what keeps us from moving forward, from living an abundant life is fear. It does not matter what kind of fear it is, but fear often keeps us locked in place, stuck in the past or unable to step out in faith.

What do we do when faced with a fear that locks us up and keeps us from moving forward? Sometimes the solution is forced upon us. I am thinking of my youngest sister, Marcia who has worked for the small college we both graduated from for 30+ years. At the beginning of the year they came to her and others like her in the administration asking them to consider an early retirement buyout. But as she is only 55 years old, she has many years left to work at something. She was not sure of what the future might hold and considered not taking the offer, that was until they came to her individually saying, we are eliminating your position, but here is a different position that was not at the same level as her current one. So now she is on the verge of looking for a new job after 30+ years in the same place. In some ways they

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set her free from her fears by forcing her to make the change she was not sure she was ready for.

Then there are others, like a young man I talked with the other day. He too has fears about where life is taking him. Like many others in their early thirties, he so desperately wants a life that has avoided him up to this point. Still single having not accomplished the list of things he thought he would at this stage in life. He in many ways has changed and grown yet the people around him have not. Finding less in common with his old friends and not yet connected with new ones is feeling lost and alone in life. Even as he has all the comforts and financial stability that many other people long for. What keeps holding him back is fear of the unknown, fear of the under certainty of the future ahead and how to make new connections without losing all that he has ever known.

Maybe we have Good Shepherd Sunday here in the midst of these resurrection stories to remind us of the promises God has made to us through his Son Jesus our Savior. Here in light of Jesus' resurrection and victory over death we can trust and believe that Jesus will and can overcome the fears which are holding us back from living an abundant life. Even more so as Jesus alleviates our deepest fears we are then freed up to be there for others to help alleviate their fears, their apprehensions so they might take that step of faith into their future. In that way we can become the people God needs us to be for the world God loves so much.

After all Easter and the power of the resurrection is not just an annual remembrance or a onetime event but a way of life, a life guided by the hopes and the promises of Christ our Lord. For life is more than more than we hope for, love is more than what we receive, because both life and love are

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increased and multiplied when they are shared. And when life and love are shared fear and hopelessness dissipate and an abundant life is revealed.

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

*Pastor Michael*

### **John 10.10b-18**

#### **Jesus the Good Shepherd**

Jesus said; 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. '

'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No 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 have received this command from my Father.'