

Sermon for Easter 4C
Sunday, May 12, 2019
“Sheep and Shepherds alike”

Text: John 10:22-30; Psalm 23

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we begin the week that is at the midpoint in the Great Fifty Days of Easter, and during Eastertide, we remain focused on the principal theme of Easter, which is the proclamation that we have seen the risen Lord. During this festive season, we recognize that Jesus the Christ indeed is alive and that he lives and moves among us. In the midst of the joys and sorrows of our daily lives, we are reassured that because he lives, we can face whatever happens today, tomorrow, the next day, and the next. That is a very comforting thought indeed!

This particular Sunday is known as “Good Shepherd Sunday” because we hear in the gospel lesson echoes of the words of Jesus: “I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me.” The shepherd lays down his life for his sheep and protects his sheep from the wolves that sneak up intending to snatch them away. We are comforted in the knowledge that no matter what, God always has our back. That idea is reinforced in no better way than in the words of Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,” because God’s goodness and his mercy will follow us all the days of our lives and we remain in his comforting care forever. That’s a very powerful thing, especially during those times in our lives when we aren’t sure what’s going to happen next. Those times when our future seems uncertain. Those times when we feel helpless and hopeless, when we feel turmoil and desperation, when we feel like we don’t know how we will go on. Those times when we aren’t sure whether God is really there or not, in the midst of our fears, doubts, and questions. Because he is our shepherd, God will never abandon us.

When we proclaim the Easter message that we have seen the risen Lord, we say to the child afraid for her safety at home, to the spouse victimized by domestic violence, to the college student who wonders whether there will be any jobs after graduation, to the person fearful of being stopped by police because of his skin color, to the police officer who never knows what will happen when he arrives on the scene, to the person midway through life afraid of losing her career, to the retiree with

no idea of what to do with so much free time, to the one mired in grief at the loss of a child or a spouse, to the person shattered by the disintegration of a relationship, that when life conspires to make us feel unsafe and unworthy, God's undying, unconditional, and unyielding love will get us through it. "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. No one will snatch them out of my hand." We live in scary times, but John's message to us who hear it in his gospel is that no matter what, God will not abandon us, and a better day is coming.

But, earlier this week, I stumbled on an interesting revelation. I spent this past Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday at the annual diocesan clergy retreat. We listened to our keynote speaker, The Very Rev. Kelly Brown-Douglas, Dean of the Episcopal Divinity School now located at Union Theological Seminary in Manhattan. She gave a very powerful and disturbing speech on the history and sin of racism in this country and how this plague is part of the very fabric, the very DNA of our nation's existence. She called on the church to speak out and be a witness against not just racism, but also many other injustices we encounter in society: economic injustice, domestic violence, discrimination against others based on sexuality, orientation, or gender identity, xenophobia and discrimination against those who choose to seek a better life in this country for themselves and their families. The revelation that I had was that in proclaiming the message of Easter that we have seen the risen Lord and that God lives and moves among us, we are the mouths, hands, and feet of God in the world. Inasmuch as God always comforts and shepherds us as our shepherd, we are also responsible for being shepherds to each other. It is our duty as Christians to live our lives in such a way so as to proclaim that God does not abandon his people, and that God's transformation of life here on earth will be done through us. It's up to us to help make this world a better place for ourselves and for our sisters and brothers.

This understanding of what it means to be part of the flock of Jesus Christ, sheep who know his voice and follow him, is seen in our lesson from the Acts of the Apostles today in which Peter brought Tabitha (also, called Dorcas in Greek) back to life. Peter had taken seriously Jesus's command to him that we heard last week to feed his sheep and tend his lambs, and was thus empowered to continue God's work in the world. As members of Jesus's flock through our baptism, are all shepherds too,

charged with caring for each other. Our response to whatever is happening in our lives, in our nation, and in the world should always reflect the vows that we take in our baptismal covenant: to seek and serve Christ in all persons, to love our neighbor as ourselves, to strive for justice and peace among *all* people, and to respect the dignity of every human being. I don't preach politics from the pulpit, but our response to what happens in our nation and the world, even how we vote, should always reflect our commitment to Christ at our baptism.

Who is our shepherd? God is. Why do we need shepherding? Because when things in this life that attack us from all sides and we can't see our way forward, we are reassured that God will never abandon us. And the skin that we give in this game of life is that as sheep in the fold of Jesus Christ, we shepherd each other to make a difference in somebody's life and bring us all just a little bit closer to the realization of God's Kingdom. Amen.

Resource

David Lose, "Easter 4C: The Electing Word," in *In the Meantime*,
<http://www.davidlose.net/2016/04/easter-4-c-the-electing-word/>