

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski

Fourth Sunday of Easter - April 25, 2021

Words of Welcome

Shepherds...not an image we often come across in our day to day, and to have any knowledge of shepherds, or sheep for that matter is rare, at least for those of us in Canada. Though sheep are raised in here, most particularly in Ontario and Alberta, the majority of us don't have much, if any, exposure to that industry. So, when Jesus uses the image of a Good Shepherd to tell us a little more about himself, well, we are not as likely as those of ancient Israel to really get the depth of the meaning. Today is known as Good Shepherd Sunday, maybe we can together go a little deeper into understanding what that means for us.

We begin with a call to worship...

Call to Worship

The God of all shepherds has called us here.

We come today, celebrating God's love for us.

The Good Shepherd has given his life for us.

We come today, thanking Jesus for his witness and his teaching.

The Shepherding Spirit moves through us, bringing us new hope.

We come today ready to celebrate and to praise God.

<https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2640/worship-connection-april-25-2021>

Hymn

Saviour, like a shepherd lead us

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| 1. Saviour, like a shepherd lead us:
much we need your tender care;
in your pleasant pastures feed us;
for our use your folds prepare:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
you have bought us; yours we are.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
you have bought us, yours we are. | 2. We are yours; in love befriend us;
be the guardian of our way;
keep your flock from sin, defend us;
seek us when we go astray:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
hear your children when we pray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
hear your children when we pray. |
| 3. Let us always seek your favour;
let us always do your will.
Jesus Christ our only Saviour,
with yourself our spirits fill:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
you have loved us; love us still.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
you have loved us; love us still. | |

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Lord God, our good and loving shepherd,
You nourish our lives and lead us into green pastures.
You restore our souls with rest and peace.
You give us true joy so our cup overflows with goodness.
You walk with us through the darkest valleys, offering us courage and compassion.
At all times and in all circumstances, you are with us, Creator, Redeemer and
Guiding Spirit, so we praise you, Holy One, now and always.

Patient God, your mercy is abundant and your love endless. Trusting in your mercy,
we confess that often we have not shown your love to others, even though we claim
it for ourselves. You have called us to show compassion, but too often we are quick
to judge others. We have been called to follow Jesus, yet we are distracted by our
own plans and desires. Forgive us for falling short of your hopes for us and renew a
right spirit within us.

God of Story and Song, through the scriptures you have taught us of your love,
and lifted our hearts in praise. Send us your Holy Spirit as we listen to the witness of
your people, so that we may claim the story of your redeeming love again and praise
you with our lives through Christ, our Lord and Guide. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

The mercy of our God is from everlasting to everlasting.
Friends, hear and believe the good news of the gospel.
In Jesus Christ, God's generous love reaches out to embrace us.
We are forgiven and set free to begin again.
Let us give thanks for God's most generous love.

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Scripture Reading John 10:11-18

¹¹"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The 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. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I 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. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No 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."

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message I know my own and my own know me

My home town has a community hall that holds over 350 people. It was the place where we went for dances, community functions, graduation was held there, and my wedding reception and dance happened in that building. It didn't seem to matter what was going on, if I was laughing and often when I was talking, my husband Ken could pick me out of the crowd just by my voice. I like to think my voice isn't as high pitched and I am not as loud as I was when I was young, but Ken knew and knows my voice. I don't think it was that everyone could pick me out, but for many of us, we know the mannerisms, tone, laughter, and speech of those closest to us, so it doesn't take much to be able to recognize someone by their voice even if at first we don't see them.

It seems that, just like people recognizing the familiar voice of someone close to them, animals can pick out their humans as well. Dogs are particularly wonderful at making us feel loved and recognized. Our dog Ty would go nuts with excitement as she heard us or saw us approach. This is the experience of most dog owners, but when our oldest son's friends approached the door, she was never impressed. It was the only time Ty barked to warn us that someone was headed toward our door. By the way, they were good people so I am not sure what was going on there.

It is with these stories of familiarity that we approach the scriptures about the Good Shepherd. Now I can't speak from any experience with sheep, but my understanding is that sheep know the voice of their shepherd. They will come when they hear the voice of the shepherd calling because they trust it. There is a relationship of knowing that there is something in that voice that means protection, nourishment, and safety.

In ancient times shepherding was not for the faint of heart. It was long days, cold nights, lonely, isolating, and could be dangerous. There are examples of that kind of shepherding even today, although the industry has certainly changed. Still, in order to understand what Jesus is saying when he says, "I am the good shepherd" one needs a little context. It seems that shepherds were just about the lowest rung on the social ladder in Jesus' time, but it was also how the most famous King in the Bible got his start. King David was a shepherd boy (1 Samuel 16:11) who had a heart for God and for his people. He was and continues to be heralded as the kind of leader Israel is waiting for.

The Psalms, which have long been considered the hymn-book of the Bible don't shy away from using the image of shepherd as a way to describe the Hebrew people's relationship with God. Psalm 80 begins, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!" And likely the most familiar words in the Bible come from Psalm 23 which begins with "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." This association of God with the image of a shepherd would have had deep undertones for the people listening to Jesus speak that day and as he said, "I am the good shepherd."

So, what does it mean that Jesus is the Good Shepherd? It is just that Jesus is a good person who cares for others? It may be important to define “good”. The kind of goodness that Jesus is talking about has to do with character, but it is more than being a “good” person. There are many good people in the world. I know a lot of good people. Yet that does not begin to delve into what “good” means in this case. A good shepherd would protect the sheep in his or her care. Make sure that sheep were healthy, had food, were safe from harm. Animals have a way of getting into our hearts and so love would also be a part of the relationship. And I believe one must be careful not to take the analogies too far, but to understand that Jesus knows us, cares for us, desires to protect and love us, in fact lay down his own life at his will for us, well that simply speaks volumes about the kind of Lord and Saviour that we have in Jesus.

Still, the line that I am stuck on in this whole reading is this, “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.”

Our understanding is that Jesus and God were intimately known to one another, so if that is the case then the desired relationship for Jesus and us is one where we intimately know one another. Having said that, it may be that this relationship is far more one-sided than Jesus hopes and longs for. In our work a day, get through the day, life-styles, often any thought of Jesus is fleeting. There is no intimacy on our part.

Jesus knows us. We are all created in the image of God and in relationship with God, and so Jesus knows us. He says, “I know my own”. What is lacking is the reciprocal dedication, time, energy, or devotion to the one who loves us.

I think of any close, loving, and trusting relationship, be it with a spouse, partner, child, or friend. In order for the relationship to continue in that manner it takes time, trust, and vulnerability. It takes caring enough to stop and enjoy one another’s company, or share when things have not gone well. It is about talking, listening, being still with one another, and being active in each other’s lives.

Jesus says, “my own know me” but if we have not spent time getting to know Jesus how can we know him? It is a relationship that needs care and attention. It means seeking Jesus in words of scripture, but also in one another. This time spent paying attention, in conversation, builds trust, it also builds confidence as one begins to “hear” Jesus’ voice. There is no short cut in this relationship. As in any relationship it takes time, experience, knowledge, building on moment with another moment and another.

Be assured that this relationship building will bring you things you could not have anticipated and understanding that no other human relationship can. To know Jesus means that you can claim the promises of God because you know and experience the promises of God...life abundant, hope, love that surpasses understanding, and joy.

By no means should one take this to say that life will be perfect and all your troubles will be gone. That is not what is promised. What is promised is God's presence through Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus knows his own. We are all God's own. For some who spend the time, who build trust, who get to know Jesus, well, you will know Jesus. You will know that you are one of Jesus' own. You will recognize Jesus' voice speaking to you in the vastness of creation and in the quiet of your heart.

How will you know this is Jesus? Through the words of scripture that teach us of the heart of God. Hearing Jesus in your life will not contradict his words and actions as attested to by the words of scripture. Knowing it is Jesus can also come through the wise counsel of those who have also put in the time to know Jesus and seek to understand scripture.

Jesus is the good shepherd, the one who loves, cares, protects, and save us. It is not for us to determine who are Jesus' own. Jesus can take care of that. Our work is to give our time in building and strengthening our relationship with Jesus. We are called to welcome and share community and hospitality with others that also feel that desire to have their own relationship with Jesus. Finally, it is for us to be love to others, speaking and behaving in ways that witness to the love of Jesus for all people regardless of race, religion, gender, status, or wealth.

Beginning this day, may you be strengthened and have life abundant in and by the one good shepherd, Jesus, who calls you his own.

Prayers of the People

Gracious and loving God,
as a shepherd cares for the flock, so you care for each one of us. Move in our hearts and minds, our congregations and communities, and lead us to care for one another for the sake of Jesus, our Good Shepherd. Today we thank you for the gift of rest. We pray for all those who are tired from work or worry, especially in these days of pandemic. Grant peace to those who are worn out with anxiety or frustration, and rest for all those who are weary from the responsibilities of their work.

God our Guide,
we thank you for the gifts of truth and wisdom. We pray for those who cannot discern truth in the midst of conspiracy theories, and for all who suffer under authorities who distort reality for their own ends. Grant wisdom and common sense to all who must make decisions in these confusing days of competing arguments.

God our Strength,
we thank you for the ways you refresh our souls. We pray for those whose lives are burdened with poverty or with uncertainty about the future beyond the pandemic.

We remember all who face any sort of trial or difficulty, those who are sick, in pain, or facing death, and those who are bereaved by the loss of someone dear. For all of these precious souls, be their source of healing and peace.

God our Shield and Defender,
we thank you for staying with us when we face danger or death. We pray for all those who live in fear: prisoners, exiles and refugees, victims of oppression, racism and hatred, those who know the threat of violence day after day. Be for them a steady companion and their source of courage.

God our Provider,
we thank you for all the ways you fill our cup to overflowing. Thank you for offering peace and calm in the midst of turmoil, for the return of happiness after times of strife, and for insight emerging after confusion and indecision. Help us recognize your redeeming gifts which guide us and give us hope. Show us how we can be part of your redeeming work unfolding in the world around us, and bless the ministries undertaken through The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Bless those who serve in challenging missions in Canada and around the world. Equip them well to reach out in love and respect, together with local partners, to accomplish your will in Jesus' name. Hear us as we offer the prayer that Jesus taught us:

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Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Invitation to make an offering

We offer our gifts to God, asking God to bless them and multiply their impact in the world to accomplish God's will. There are people from different churches and places following this service. As you present your offering to God this day to your church community may they be used wisely in mission and service, in our communities and through outreach, for the sake of Christ, our Risen Lord.

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If you would like to learn more about St. Andrew's, get involved in our ministry and work, or make a donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian, in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> for more information or to connect with me.

Refrain:

You satisfy the hungry heart with gift of finest wheat;
come give to us, O saving Lord, the bread of life to eat.

1. As when the shepherd calls the sheep,
they know and heed that voice,
so when you call your family,
we follow and rejoice. *Refrain*
2. With joyful lips we sing to you
our praise and gratitude,
that you should count us worthy friends
to share this heavenly food. *Refrain*
3. Is not the cup we bless and share
the blood of Christ outpoured?
Do not one cup, one loaf, declare
our oneness in the Lord? *Refrain*
4. The mystery of your presence here,
no mortal tongue can tell;
whom all the world cannot contain
comes in our hearts to dwell. *Refrain*
5. In gracious love you give yourself;
then selfless let us be,
to serve each other in your name
in truth and charity. *Refrain*

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Benediction

The Good Shepherd leads us forward,
from this place, into the world to serve God's people,
to witness to God's love in all that we do.
Go in peace and God's peace will go with you.

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