



# SAINT LUKE'S

EASTER 4  
YEAR A

ACTS 2:42-47  
PSALM 23  
1 PETER 2:19-25  
JOHN 10:1-10

A SERMON BY THE REV. WILLIAM OGBURN  
MAY 7, 2017

In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we celebrate the fourth Sunday of Easter as ‘Good shepherd Sunday.’ The Gospel lesson appointed for the fourth Sunday of Easter is always a reading from some part of the tenth chapter of John’s Gospel. And while the verses of John 10 vary, it is always paired with the twenty-third Psalm. The Gospel readings up to today have been accounts of Jesus after the Resurrection. But this Sunday, we hear from Jesus well before his trial, crucifixion, and death. All of the post-Easter Gospel lessons, despite where they fall chronologically, are pointing to one thing: Jesus is God’s Messiah, the one whom we can fully put our hope and our confidence. Today’s Gospel lesson is no different.

If you can think back to the fourth Sunday in Lent, you may recall the story of the man born blind. Jesus’ disciples ask him “Who sinned, this man who was born blind -or his parents?” It’s a long and complicated dialogue that follows, including the Pharisees not believing that Jesus had healed the man born blind, and later kicking the man out of town. Ultimately, Jesus says that neither the man nor his parents sinned. No one was being punished. Jesus said that God’s works were being revealed through the blind man, who had a clearer sight of God than these Pharisees, whose acts of judging for themselves kept them in a perpetual state of sin. Had the Pharisees been ready to admit their need for the light of world, they would not have been guilty. But because the Pharisees claimed to know and have an answer for everything, there was “no room for the revelation of the light that comes through Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Moloney, Francis J., and Daniel J. Harrington. *The Gospel of John*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005, 302.

It is directly after this encounter with the Pharisees that Jesus begins speaking about himself as the gate, the gatekeeper, and the Good Shepherd. I will admit that I am always taken aback when I hear, ““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.” I think to myself, so many people try to do good, live holy lives, and try to get to God’s side of eternity by any way imaginable. But then I also remember that Jesus is the very definition of integrity. Jesus doesn’t mean here that there is not one single spiritual discipline or practice that will get us through the gate. Jesus does mean, however, that the Kingdom of God won’t be entered by trickery or deceit! We can’t slip into the back door of heaven. We can’t be stowaways in the fuller life of God. We can only get inside this Gate by God’s gracious and welcoming invitation, with hearts that are open, humble, and honest. It’s in admitting our own blindness...our own need for the light of the Gospel... that we begin to see into the fuller life of God.

Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd. He calls himself this to distinguish from many bad shepherds who have selfishly, foolishly, and subversively led the people of Israel. Perhaps you can imagine what a bad shepherd looks like: Shepherds who aren’t paying attention to wolves prowling; shepherds who only look out for certain sheep; Shepherds who promise anything to get you to follow them...and then take away your healthcare. Jesus is assuring us that he can be trusted in a way that political and even religious leaders cannot be trusted. Jesus is in a unique relationship with God the Father. Jesus knows God’s voice ~ and we know Jesus’ voice as the one who tends and cares for us like no one else can.

So much of what gets in the way of the Pharisees (and dare I say in our own way) is the time we spend in judging ourselves and others. Jesus is the only one who was any right to judge - and he'd rather die than pass judgment. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who goes after us and brings us through the Gate. He rescues us from going our own way...the way that leads to isolation and death.

A *New Yorker* article<sup>2</sup> from 2007 introduced me to Robert Alter, whose new translation of the Psalter I found to be refreshing and insightful. In Psalm 23, Alter translates what we usually read as "follow me all the days of my life" to "pursue me all the days of my life." Is God's goodness and love and mercy and truth following us wherever we choose to go? If you think that's the case, how's that working out for you? Or is God actively pursuing us, constantly saving us from ourselves and ushering us into greater life in God. Going our own way means death. That's why God so actively pursues us: to save us from ourselves and to bring us into God's fold.

Today's lesson from Acts is about the first community that formed after Jesus' Resurrection. Hear the description of that community: "Those who had been baptized devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.... All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day 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, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people." This is how people acted after they met our risen Lord. They took care of each other. They built each other up. They prayed.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/10/01/desert-storm>

They broke bread together. They had glad and generous hearts. This is how we act when we too have met the resurrected Christ. We know that Jesus is the Good Shepherd and that he actively pursues us, bringing us back into God's fold. May Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, continue to shepherd us beyond our wants, beyond our fears and brings us from death into abundant life.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

<sup>9</sup> *Book of Common Prayer, Good Friday Office, 282.*



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