



# SAINT LUKE'S

EASTER 4  
YEAR B

ACTS 4:5-12  
1 JOHN 3:16-24  
JOHN 10:11-18  
PSALM 23

A SERMON BY THE REV. WILLIAM OGBURN  
APRIL 22, 2018

✠ 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. Since Easter Day, the Gospel readings have been accounts of Jesus after his 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.

At my last parish in Rhode Island, I buried a lot of people. Sometimes with one to three funerals a week, I thought I was the angel of death. With so many funerals, I had become friends with the local undertaker and we bonded because it felt like we were the only two people in the village older than 18 and younger than 65. When you're a priest and friends with an undertaker, you get called on often! What I find interesting is that when I would sit down a family after a death, most often they would pick this Gospel lesson for the funeral. What is it about the Good Shepherd image that we find so comforting and familiar? Perhaps the closest things we have to shepherds in NYC are dog-walkers. Even in an urban setting, we can still identify with the Good Shepherd image.

Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd. Another way of understanding 'good' here is 'true.' Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd like he calls

himself “True Bread,” the “True Vine.” He calls himself this to distinguish from many bad, false 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 then betray you. Jesus dismisses these bad shepherds and focuses his attention on his own flock: he knows his own and his own know him. They mutually know by instinct. 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 the Father’s voice ~ and we know Jesus’ voice as the one who tends and cares for us like no one else can.

The other piece here is Jesus’ self-sacrifice. His flock is of such value and worth that he is willing to die in order to protect it. Jesus is not disparaging the hired hand here. But he is saying that Jesus himself has an investment in us that no other caretaker can understand. We are Jesus’ self-investment and he died to rescue us from sin and death. Jesus says, “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.” This is clearly related to his resurrection and the first allusion to it in John’s Gospel.

In 2018, obedience isn’t exactly a popular word. I would guess that is partially the case because many bad or false shepherds have led us astray. Individualism and self-sufficiency are hallmarks of American identity, but that does not align with the Good News of the Good Shepherd. To be a

follower of Jesus means to acknowledge the need for a Savior and to understand that we cannot do this on our own. To be a follower of Jesus is to acknowledge our own brokenness and our inability rescue ourselves. But to understand that is what makes us followers. Jesus notes that there are two parts to obeying him: listening to his voice and following his instructions. As Christ the Good Shepherd's people, we have choices to make: choices to listen or ignore; choices to follow or wander; choices to be obedient or disobedient. We make these choices as individuals, we make choices as the parish of St Luke in the Fields, as Episcopalians, we make choices as cities, states, and nations. And we must ask ourselves are we following the Good Shepherd or are we wandering our own way. We have a choice to be a crucifixion people or a resurrection people.

A crucifixion people will always make choices that lead to bitterness, resentment, malice, hatred, evil, and war. A crucifixion people are entitled -- and always insist on being right. But a resurrection people, knowing that they are firmly planted in the love of God through Jesus Christ, make choices that lead to deeper relationship, to joy, hope in God, growing faith, openness to possibility, trust, and sharing abiding love for one another and ways that take care of each other. Which do we wish to be? Do we want to be a crucifixion people or a resurrection people?

As people baptized into the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, our Baptismal Covenant is a reminder that God's love for us is unconditional, but also that it is not without expectations. That accountability leads us away from selfishness and self-sufficiency to, as Bishop Stephen Bayne put it, "mutual responsibility and interdependence." And "mutual responsibility and

interdependence” is the guiding principle of our *Book of Common Prayer*. *Our prayer life as a church helps make us a resurrection people.*

Going our own way means death. Following Jesus means participating in greater life in God. And greater life in God means more than living for just ourselves alone. It means that we make our lives a living sacrifice to glory of God through Jesus Christ ~ and in services to other people. May God give us ears to hear Jesus’ voice and wills to obey him that we may follow where he leads us. And may God gives us the grace and courage to be a resurrection people whose song is always Alleluia.

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





THE CHURCH OF ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS  
487 HUDSON STREET  
NEW YORK, NY 10014

TEL: 212.924.0562

FAX: 212. 633.2098

WEB SITE: [WWW.STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG](http://WWW.STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG)

EMAIL: [INFO@STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG](mailto:INFO@STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG)