

Holy Trinity Anglican Church  
Reverend Michael Fleming  
Easter 4  
April 25, 2021

Celebrant: The parishes of the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa sit on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

All: **May we dwell together in harmony and peace.**

Celebrant: Alleluia! Christ is risen.

All: **The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.**

Celebrant: May his grace and peace be with you.

All: **May he fill our hearts with joy. Alleluia!**

Celebrant: Almighty God....

**All to you all hearts are open,  
all desires known,  
and from you no secrets are hidden.  
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts  
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love you,  
and worthily magnify your holy name;  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Celebrant: Glory to God in the highest,

**All and peace to his people on earth.**

**Lord God, heavenly king, almighty God and Father,  
We worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your Glory.  
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God,  
You take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us;  
You are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.  
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,  
You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,  
In the glory of God the Father. Amen**

Celebrant: O God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do your will, and work in us that which is well-pleasing in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All: **Amen**

The First Reading is from the book of Acts, Chapter 4, Verses 5 to 12

The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's

family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?”

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

Jesus is

“the stone you builders rejected,  
which has become the cornerstone.’

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

This is the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.

**He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters.**

He revives my soul and guides me along right pathways for his name’s sake.

**Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup is running over.

**Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.**

The Second Reading is from the first Book of John, Chapter 3, Verses 16 to 24

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him.

And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

This is the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

Celebrant: The Holy Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ according to the blessed St. John Chapter 10, Verses 11 to 18

All: **Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep 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 are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

The Gospel of Christ.

**Praise to you Lord, Jesus Christ**

**The Homily - "I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD...."**



From the heart of a small tree which seemed to be afire came The Voice which said, “Moses, go back to Egypt and say this to Pharaoh - ‘Let my people go.’” Moses stared into the flames and answered, “In whose name am I to do this, for he will not listen to me?” The Voice answered, “Tell Pharaoh, ‘*I am who I am*’ sends you.”

***I AM*** – a phrase spoken more than a thousand times in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. One of the first time it is used, God says to Abram, “I am God Almighty- walk before me and be blameless” and this phrase *I AM* becomes, if you will, a code word for the name of God because the people were forbidden from saying the name above all names out loud. This identification of the *I AM* with the name and character of God becomes a critical descriptor used by Jesus some fifteen times and in the using of this ancient codeword, he is saying more than simply I am a shepherd, I am a light, I am a door etc... By using the phrase, Jesus is self-identifying with God and signals to the disciples that he is not just a human person but a part of the Godhead of *I AM*. When he says “I am the Good Shepherd” in the gospel narrative today, I believe that Jesus is referring beyond himself and is literally saying, “God is the Good Shepherd and because He and I are one, so too am I ‘***I AM***’”. Jesus always pointed beyond himself to his Father.

For so many of us, this idea of God and Jesus being the Good Shepherd is a foreign concept to say the least – we have no idea whatsoever of what a shepherd was like in Jesus’ time nor what a modern-day shepherd is all about. We carry with us a false image of a young and very muscular man skipping through a field with his faithful dog at his side being watched by adoring and oh so cute little sheepies who will follow him anywhere! Or of our kids wearing dressing gowns and potato sacks in the annual Christmas pageant. I must confess that the first image that pops into MY mind when I see the word “shepherd” is the Looney Tunes cartoon involving a wolf and a very amiable sheepdog named Ralph who clock in at 7:00 in the morning, spend the day playing “catch the wool” and then punching out at 5:00 and sharing a post-work beverage together.

So, when Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd”, how would that have been received by those who heard these words for the first time? What came to mind when the Lord likened himself to this most common occupation?

To understand how people saw the role of a shepherd in Jesus’ world, we need to travel back in time to when humans lived a nomadic life, a time before we settled into cities and began to cultivate crops. In those days, the wealth of a tribe was calculated by the number of sheep and goats it maintained in a flock and the role of watching over and guarding the herd often was given to the sons, and the occasional daughter of the leaders of the community. In those days, the shepherd was considered a valuable and honourable role because the welfare of the whole tribe was in the hands of these persons.

When the children of Israel went to Egypt, they found that their new overlords thought sheep were disgusting creatures and thus anyone who looked after them was considered to be a worthless person who was to be seen and treated as an outsider. Following the Exodus, the children of Israel carried with them both images of the shepherd as valued custodian of the wealth of the community and as an outsider who was deemed to be not fit company into the Promised Land. No wonder most shepherds preferred to stay in the hills!

In the time of Jesus, a shepherd lived in a halfway up and halfway down (to quote my favourite philosopher Winnie the Pooh) sort of place in their culture. The shepherd was seen as a vital member of their community, commissioned as the guardian of the wealth of the town. He was responsible for the safety of the sheep and goats who provided wool, milk and meat and was held accountable by all. Given this, you would think that the shepherd was held in high esteem and honour, but you would be incorrect – the shepherd was also seen as being an outsider, as someone who preferred the company of four-legged beasts over that of civilized women and men; when he came to town, people would cross the street because he was rather odiferous, especially after a rain. If he was someone merely hired to do the job, his motivations were suspect and every loss of a sheep or goat was deemed as highly questionable. But at the same time, he was considered important because his work was exacting and dangerous - each morning, he led the flock from their pens into the hills or the valleys near the village and watched over them, keeping them watered and moving them to different fields as the grasses were consumed; the shepherd had to keep a wary eye out for predators of both the four-legged and two-legged varieties; at night, he would lead his charges back to their fold and would more often than not curl up beside the sheep and goats just in case anything decided to attack the herd. Interestingly, a shepherd did not walk behind the herd prodding them along with his staff but walked before them, calling the herd by name, leading them forward and being trusted by the sheep with their very lives! His call was so distinct that a flock could differentiate between their shepherd and any other false one!

When Jesus spoke of the GOOD shepherd, he was probably thinking of the great psalm of his ancestor David which we recognize as the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. In this hymn of homage and joy, David describes the ideal shepherd. For David, and thus for Jesus, a shepherd was good if he provided for all the needs of his flock; if the shepherd led the sheep to and maintained a green and pleasant land in which they could graze and live without fear; if he leads the sheep along routes in life which are safe and in which he will protect them from all harm; a good shepherd stays with his community and does not run away at the first sign of danger or stress - he will remain to defend his own against all those who seek to harm the ones he loves; the goodness of the shepherd is shown in the care and love he shows for his charges and the lengths to which he is committed, even to death itself, to protect and defend his people.

How we long for the blessed assurance that, even in the heart of the darkness of this pandemic time, our Good Shepherd God remains constant and with us. Even when we do not feel his presence, even when he is silent when we cry to him, our blessed hope, our blessed certainty is that our **I AM** the Good Shepherd is watching over us, leading us through the shadows and the valleys of life to that place where we will lie down and rest beside waters that offer us comfort, joy and love. We seek the path which he walks before us; we lean into the wind listening for him to call us by name; we open our hands to receive his blessing and open our hearts to receive his love.

My suggestion for all of us this week is a simple one: take the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, read it over several times and then REWRITE it so that it speaks to and for and of you in whatever place you find yourself. In this way, I pray that the timeless words of David find new resonance in your life and that you will say with such blessed assurance, The Good Shepherd **I Am** is with me now and always. Alleluia!

The Apostles' Creed

*Celebrant* Let us confess the faith of our baptism, *as we say,*

**All I believe in God,**

**the Father almighty,**

**creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.**

**He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.**

**He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.**

**He descended to the dead.**

**On the third day he rose again.**

**He ascended into heaven,**

**and is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

**He will come again**

**to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,**

**the holy catholic Church,**

**the communion of saints,**

**the forgiveness of sins,**

**the resurrection of the body,**

**and the life everlasting. Amen.**

*Celebrant:* In all peace and hope, let us pray to the Lord.

**All: Lord, hear us and have mercy upon us.**

*Celebrant:* O God, our loving Shepherd, you come to us with the love and strength of a father and the tender mercies, patience and protection of a mother. We see you in the very living of our daily lives, you prayers for ourselves and others. For this, let us pray to the Lord...

**All: Lord, hear us and have mercy upon us.**

*Celebrant:* We pray for all those who are in need – those who hunger or who are homeless. We pray for all those who are in pain – the abused, the broken-hearted. We pray for all the lonely people, remembering those who are finding it nearly impossible to live through the aloneness which COVID 19 has forced upon them, isolated from their communities and friends and unable to escape the darkness which surrounds them. We pray for the sick in body, mind or spirit and for those who grieve. For the life of the communities in which we live and find our meaning and purpose, and for all those who sacrifice so that we may be cared for through this pandemic; for those who have earned our trust because of their role as unsung heroes and heroines in our lives. For all this, let us pray to the Lord...

**All: Lord, hear us and have mercy upon us.**

Free us Lord, as your own people, to sing your praise in the work of our ordinary lives. In those comings and goings of our simple and complicated living, make us instruments of your

peace and grace. Help us to set the example of servanthood and care which a good shepherd shows for their flock. For this, let us pray to the Lord...

All: **Lord, hear us and have mercy upon us.**

Bless our memories, O Good Shepherd, that in our remembering, we may partake of the mystery that is eternal life in all its fullness. Help us to see in the beauty of this dawning Spring hope for the future; in the disappearance of winter snow and ice, help us to remember that you are the Light of the world and that we have been called by the Shepherd to light so shine before others that all may be drawn to the Light of light and Lord of lords. For this, let us pray to the Lord...

All: **Lord, hear us and have mercy upon us.**

(from Worship, Life in Liturgy website – adapted)

Celebrant: Let us confess where we have fallen short of the love of the Good Shepherd.

All: **Lord, God, Heavenly Father and Mother, we all like sheep have gone astray, led away from the right path by the Evil One and our own sinful desires. Graciously forgive us our sins and shortcomings for the sake of your Son Jesus and awaken our hearts by the Holy Spirit that we may abide in your Word, and in true repentance and a steadfast faith continue in your Church until the end and obtain eternal salvation; through Jesus Christ our Good Shepherd who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen**

Celebrant: Be our Shepherd, O Lord and bless us with all good things and thoughts that we may be refreshed with your overflowing cup and dwell in your house forever; we pray this in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **Amen.**

We ask you to watch over all our parish family, remembering especially Zachariah, Marjorie, Cheryl, Jeanette, Roy, Emerson, Irene, Lynne, and their families. May we, by example, draw others towards the glorious Light of the World.

In the Worldwide Anglican Cycle of Prayer, we pray for The Nippon Sei Ko Kai.

In our Diocesan Cycle, we pray for St. Mark the Evangelist, Ottawa, and their Priest, The Reverend Julian Campbell. We pray for the Parish of Pakenham: St. Mark's, Pakenham; St. John's, Antrim; St. George's, Waba; and all those who minister there.

We pray for the Chaplain of the Ottawa Fire Department, The Reverend Canon John Bridges.

#### Additional Prayers

All: **Lord, you are our Good Shepherd so we will lack nothing. You restore our souls! You lead us on the right path because it is in your nature to do so. Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we shall not be afraid for you are with us. We thank you for equipping us with your rod and staff so that we can be comforted. You anoint our heads with oil. You ensure us that our portion runs over with abundance! Thank you for this Good Shepherd Sunday and for your goodness and mercies all the days of our lives. Amen**

(from [connectusfund.org](http://connectusfund.org))

Celebrant: We thank you with our whole hearts, O beloved Father, for the precious blood of your dear Son Jesus which he shed for our sake, and by which you daily cleanse, quicken and sanctify us in your Holy Church, and make us partakers of your divine nature. We thank you for the great and unspeakable love, though we are not worthy of it, when you redeemed us by your own Son who is our High Priest and Mediator, the true Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep of his flock; who now sits on your right hand and intercedes for us. O good and faithful God, Friend of all humankind, give us your grace and great compassion, that we may praise you with your Son and Holy Spirit in every act of our lives for ever and evermore. Amen

(St. Augustine – fifth century from a collection of prayers.com)

**All: Dear Lord, we thank you for the works that you have done in your Father's name for they bear witness to you. We believe in you because we are your sheep and goats. You are our Good Shepherd; we hear your voice, know you and follow you. Thank you for the eternal life that you have promised to your sheep and goats on this Good Shepherd Sunday. We give thanks because in You we will never perish! No one will snatch us from your hand for you, Father, is greater than all of them. Amen**

(from collectusfund.org)

Celebrant: O Lord Jesus, good shepherd of the sheep, you came to seek the lost and gather them into your fold. Have compassion on all those who have wandered away from you; feed those who hunger; make the weary to lie down in your sweet pastures; bind up those whose hearts are broken and strengthen all those who are weak. May we rely n your care, find comfort in your love and abide in you guidance all the days of our lives. We ask this for your precious Name's sake. Amen

(Sixth century collect from *acollectionofprayers.com*)

#### Blessing and Dismissal

Celebrant: O Lord, be our Sanctifier and our Shepherd. Strengthen us and help us, that in our daily walk with you, we may serve you in quietness of spirit, through Jesus Christ our Good Shepherd and Master.

(From the Roman Breviary of 11<sup>th</sup> Century *acollectionofprayers.com*)

And the peace of God which passes all our understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be among us and remain with us always. Amen