

The Fourth Sunday of Easter
Sunday April 22, 2018
John 10: 11-18
Faith Lutheran Kelowna, BC
“The Shepherd Calls The Sheep”

Let Us Pray

O Most Holy Shepherd . . . you lead and care for all your sheep. When we stray . . . you guide us back to right paths . . . when we wander you call our name and lure us home. O God . . . we give you thanks for times when we have known your care. When we have been sustained in times of want . . . when we have been comforted in times of fear . . . when we have seen your gift of love . . . for this we give you thanks. Equip us to offer your shelter . . . your protection . . . your care to those in need . . . to be shepherds to those who depend on us. These things we pray in the name of Christ . . . our shepherd and guide. Amen.

The twentieth century was a time when churches talked together about their differences and similarities. There have been mergers and combinations . . . new opportunities for various Christian communities to worship and serve together . . . and new understandings of how each group lives out God’s life given in Christ. This is no big news to us as we are in the midst of such sharing as Anglicans and Lutherans serving the Rutland area of Kelowna. Yet some may not know that we have been having ongoing discussions between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada since 1983. We have looked at ways in which we can live together in the same community . . . recognize each other’s ministries . . . share the Lord’s Supper in each other’s buildings . . . while remaining and celebrating our own unique denominations. These discussions have brought us to the point of signing an agreement known as the Waterloo Declaration . . . which says that we have open communion between our churches and completely recognize each other's ministries.

In recent years the conversations have continued among various other Christian denominations. In various ways these conversations have been an attempt at a way of beginning to recognize and appreciate those places where we are the same . . . instead of holding up our differences and keeping ourselves separated from each other. Although some parts of this ecumenical movement have looked for one church on earth . . . it has mostly been a celebration of the great diversity of people . . . ministries . . . and styles of worship that belongs to the baptized people of God everywhere.

Every year on this Fourth Sunday of Easter . . . we hear the gospel read from John chapter 10. This wonderful chapter reminds us of the life . . . and care **FOR** that life . . . that we have in Jesus . . . known as the Good Shepherd. This section of John chapter 10 . . . raises questions about just who the sheep are . . . a question that has been asked by Christians from the beginning of the church. With such a gospel that proclaims God’s love for all the earth . . . it is understandably human to want to know exactly which of us belong to God’s sheepfold. Restrictions have been placed and rules made. People have claimed power for themselves in ways that excluded others from receiving the sacrament . . . from being buried in consecrated or holy ground . . . even from being part of their own families if their views were different. We have in our time . . . through the ecumenical movement . . . moved away from much of this. But still . . . people want to know who is in . . . and who is out . . . who do we want to be part of the sheepfold . . . and the boundaries are still set that keep out those whom we think should not be included.

In North America . . . the divisions between Christians seems to be not so much denominational as categorical . . . there are those who are conservative, moderate, or liberal . . . there is the biblical

literalist or historical-critical . . . pro-life or pro-choice . . . law-bound or grace-centered. Whatever may divide us in our time . . . or in times past . . . the human tendency toward an exclusive claim on God's life is prevalent. This makes us wary of one another . . . and unable to hear what Jesus has to **say to us** . . . and **through us** . . . to all the earth about God's salvation.

Jesus the Good Shepherd speaks to us quite differently. Jesus says he is the one who calls the sheep . . . and the sheep know his voice. It is like what happens when a parent . . . looking for a child in a crowded place . . . simply calls out the child's name . . . and is heard by the child despite all the other noise.

JESUS' VOICE IS KNOWN TO THE SHEEP. Jesus says . . . **"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me."** Jesus also reminds the Jews of his time . . . and those of us who are the church in our time . . . **"I 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."**

Jesus' reference to the gathering of the nations in his saving work . . . is one even we in our time must be reminded of constantly. Our work for God . . . and for God's reign . . . is shared with others who bear Christ's name . . . and also by others who know Jesus' voice.

Jesus' words about who the sheep are . . . come in the context of one overarching . . . completely powerful image . . . **"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."** This Jesus . . . who calls out for all who listen to his voice . . . not only gathers the sheep . . . but even lays down his life for them. **Nowhere** . . . does Jesus say that he calls the sheep who are the brightest and best . . . he does not say that he calls the sheep and chooses one or two . . . he does not say that only the weakest of sheep need his help . . . he does not say that these sheep should be kept in separate little groups unto themselves . . . he does not make any distinctions among the sheep at all. Jesus simply tells us that **ALL** those who hear his voice . . . he will gather together and lay down his life for them. **This is an amazing Shepherd** . . . whose goodness must be that of God!!!

The people for whom Jesus lays down his life are not just the chosen few. His life is laid down for everyone. When we have learned that well . . . we will be able to live in the fullness of God's life. We have a responsibility as the sheep that know the shepherd . . . to **let ourselves** . . . and **others** . . . know that the fold has an open door. Jesus is both the shepherd and the door . . . the one that gives life in every sense. So as we gather ecumenically . . . as we work in our churches . . . towns . . . and world . . . to heal all those things that divide us . . . as we look not only for unity . . . but also for the celebration of diversity . . . we do so knowing that Jesus . . . the Good Shepherd . . . is the gatherer and the life-giver. All of our actions and life are nurtured in the gracious sheepfold of God's life in Christ.

This Good Shepherd of ours could not possibly hold all of the sheep in one building on this earth . . . and nowhere does he say that is his intention either. Christ only says that there will be one flock and one shepherd. Those who know him and hear his voice . . . will be gathered together . . . and he will lay down his life for them. **"I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me."** This is the urgent message that we have to take out into the world with us . . . as we share this gracious and loving spirit of Christ through our actions and hospitable sharing of this awesome message. Amen