Fourth Sunday of Easter

Sunday, April 30, 2023

By: Deacon Ben Remmert

Acts 2:42-47 Psalm 23 1 Peter 2:19-25 John 10:1-10

Lord, open my mouth to speak your truth and our ears to hear it. Amen.

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. Every year in the Christian church, three weeks after Easter, we celebrate the picture of Jesus Christ as our Good Shepherd. But through this imagery, I wonder about the sheep. Sheep are an interesting lot. They are often my children’s favorite animals at the petting zoo at the Renaissance Festival or the Houston Rodeo. They are built close to the ground, think mostly about eating and often get themselves into trouble because they cannot see very far ahead and do not look much beyond the next mouthful. This often gets sheep lost and into trouble.

Jesus comes to us as the Good Shepherd, one who loves us and cares for us, one whose only concern is that we may have life and have it abundantly. The one who is willing to die for us and for our sake. One who warns us about the thieves and bandits who would rob us of life.

When we, the sheep, follow the good shepherd we know this life in abundance no matter the realities of life. When we follow the good shepherd, we know the awe of which the writer of Acts speaks.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the breaking of bread and prayers. Awe came upon everyone. . . .”

We read about the church in Acts, and we could think, “Now there is a church, the kind of which we would all like to be a part. They had a singleness of purpose, working together with a clear vision and energy -- gathering, learning, praying, and sharing.”

The world as we know it, can seem far from this reality. We struggle with having enough people to run programs, getting enough volunteers, discerning whom we should help with our finite resources, finding ways to include new people, and identifying people who are withdrawing from our faith community. So often, we do not experience ‘awe’ of what is happening now. Wondering around like sheep for the next mouthful. We read of the experience of the people in Acts and must remember that we are part of that church.

We live in the light of Easter, just as they did. We celebrate the risen Christ, who is the Good Shepherd, the one who gives us victory over death. The one who gives purpose and meaning to life. We celebrate that this church has survived for centuries when there are far more reasons why it should have collapsed. The body of Christ continues to gather because Jesus rose from the dead. The body of Christ continues to grow in faith because of the apostles’ teaching, our breaking bread together, loving our neighbor, and praising God through worship and prayer.

Something far greater than any one of us is happening when we gather. God is at work, and we find that barriers are removed, love is given and received, presence of God in the sacraments is felt, and we have a community to support and care for us on this journey of life. Awe fills this place. The church continues to gather is testimony that someone far greater than any one of us is at work.

The passage from the book of Acts helps us to follow the good shepherd and to not be lead astray. When we devote ourselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, break the bread and prayer, we are following the good shepherd and not a bandit. When we sing the words of the liturgy and really read them and hear them, we can become speechless. “We offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us – ourselves, our time and our possessions, signs of your gracious love.” When we merely repeat them without hearing the power of the words, we know a bandit has taken over.

In our wishing to be like this first century church, we discover that we are part of that church. And what has happened there can also happen here. The kingdom of God is truly near, it is breaking out around us. We just have to open our eyes and our hearts.

This is the passage that seeks to shape our life together as we look to the future of our community here at Christ the King Church. These actions of the apostles and early church help us put into practice as we live our baptismal calling together. This is what it looks like to be an Easter people. As we struggle, remember friends that the Kingdom of heaven is near and that we are not alone.

To be the church that Jesus wants us to be means that we need to listen for the Good Shepherd calling. We need to live the words of the liturgy each week until they become a part of the very being. Hear the words today for the first time, sing them with the passion they deserve. Inscribe them to your heart. Then we will know the awe of people gathered by God to be the people of God in this time and place. Then we will know the abundant life that comes with following the Good Shepherd. Amen.