

Sermon – 4th Sunday of Easter (Year A)

Scripture Texts: Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10
Sermon preached at Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Episcopal Church

Focus Statement: *Jesus is the good shepherd who calls us by name, calling us away from the thieves and bandits who would exploit us and leading us to the fullness of who we were created to be.*

Loving God: May my spoken words be faithful to your written Word, and lead us all to better know the living WORD, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Outline:

1. Making a name for ourselves
 - a. Thomas Kinkade: <https://mbird.com/the-magazine/lessons-from-the-hidden-vault-of-thomas-kinkade/>
 - i. How many have heard of him? --> His style of art (inspirational, landscapes with lighthouses or cottages, and *so much light!*) & massive presence, especially in the evangelical world --> My dislike for his work (too single note, too safe, too sentimental) --> Still, it was a tragedy when he died due to alcohol and drugs in 2012.
 - ii. New documentary features the “painter of light”: *Art for Everybody*. In a revelation that couldn’t be made up, the documentary shows how Kinkade died with a locked vault of other, much more authentic, paintings
 - iii. Kinkade was trained to make movie backdrops, and found this success creating paintings for the background of people’s homes. He **made a name for himself**, but then was trapped by that name, which did not leave room for the fullness of who he was.
 - iv. Knowing this, we start to recognize how tragically unnatural his commercial work was: the light was too much, the buildings were always sealed up, and there were never any people! There is no room for the complexity of life, with its good and bad, light and darkness, joy and sorrow. He made a name for himself, but that name seems to have killed him.
 - b. The identities we construct for ourselves
 - i. Curated identities – such as my friend on FB whose marriage dissolved in the last year.
 - ii. Identities of success and productivity, highlighting our busyness and our accomplishments.
 - iii. Identities of meaning and purpose, which is so often commercialized – as explored in *Strange Rites*.
 - c. The thieves and bandits who profit from the twisting of our identities
 - i. There are always people marketing to us (commercializing a sense of meaning and purpose), people exploiting us (benefiting from our labor and failures to draw boundaries), and people treating us as the products themselves (collecting and selling our data).

- ii. This is the danger of making a name for ourselves!
- 2. "He calls his own sheep by name..."
 - a. "Thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy."
 - i. Jesus recognizes the reality of thieves and bandits.
 - ii. His death and resurrection fundamentally challenge the powers of this world. They give lie to the will to power and the threat of scarcity that drive so much in our broken world. He cares particularly for the most vulnerable – for those least able to make a name for themselves.
 - iii. In the light of Easter, we can more easily recognize the thieves and bandits, and the impact they have on us. As an article about the Kinkade documentary suggests, we do well to consider how we might complete statements like: "I am unlovable unless I ____" or "My worth is found most especially in my ____".
 - b. The good shepherd loves his sheep without condition.
 - i. Love is not contingent on the identity that we construct.
 - ii. Love is rooted in God's very nature, and in our nature as children of God.
 - iii. Like the disciples in this gospel passage, we won't always understand; but we are called to learn and to recognize the voice of the good shepherd.
 - c. This voice is the one that says: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."
 - i. Greek word for abundantly is περισσοός (peri-sOs), and it describes an excessive superabundance, more than what is needed.
 - ii. As the good shepherd, Jesus calls us by name. But, biblically, a name is more than just a reference tag or a way of getting someone's attention. Instead, a name speaks to a person's character and essence.
 - iii. God's name for us is rooted in both the fundamental reality of our belovedness, and in the best of what we might grow to be.
- 3. "Awe came upon everyone..."
 - a. Vision of a healthy flock in Acts
 - i. Awe – wonder at what God is doing
 - ii. Generosity – sell all
 - iii. Community – shared meals and prayers
 - iv. Goodwill of all people & daily additions
 - b. A healthy flock can "come in and go out and find pasture"
 - i. Trusting in the shepherd provides safety and confidence to venture beyond the sheepfold / pen, and to reach & care for others.
 - ii. There is room, for sheep following the good shepherd, for life in all its messiness and complexity, for authentic reality in all its pain and beauty.
 - iii. Trusting in the name that God gives us, rather than the name we make for ourselves, leads us into abundant life and true freedom.

Amen.