

Fourth Sunday of Easter
HYMNS: 349, 200, 241, 604, 287, 95.

INTROIT: Psalm 23

L The LORD is my shepherd.
C **I shall not lack anything.**
L He makes me lie down in green pastures.
C **He leads me to water where there is quiet.**
L He restores my soul.
C He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
L Even though I walk through the valley of deep darkness, I shall fear no evil.
C **For You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.**
L You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
C **You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.**
L Surely, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life,
All **and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.**

COLLECT: Almighty God, merciful Father, since You have awakened from death the Shepherd of Your sheep, grant us Your Holy Spirit that when we hear the voice of our Shepherd we may know Him who calls us each by name and follow where He leads; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

READINGS:

1st reading: Acts 2:42-47.

Epistle: 1 Peter 2:19-25.

Gospel: John 10:1-10.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **Amen.**

The text for our sermon for this morning is written in the book of John 10:1-10 which was our Gospel reading before.

1 “Truly, truly, I tell you, the man who does not come into the sheepfold through the door but climbs over somewhere else is a thief and a robber. **2** However, the One who comes in through the door is the Shepherd of the sheep. **3** The doorkeeper opens the door for Him, and the sheep listen to His voice. He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out.

4 “When He brings out all His own sheep, He walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow Him because they know His voice. **5** They will not follow a stranger, but will run away from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.”

6 Jesus told them this dark saying, but they did not understand what He was telling them. **7** Therefore Jesus spoke again: “Truly, truly, I tell you, I am the Door for the sheep. **8** All who have come before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. **9** I am the Door. If anyone comes in through Me, he will be saved, and will come in and go out, and find pasture. **10** The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it abundantly.”

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,
Peace be with you.

Those of you who have had anything to do with real estate know that the value of any given piece of property depends on three things: location, location, and location. There is a similar saying about understanding

language whether it is written or spoken. The true meaning depends on three things: context, context, and context.

According to the Three Year Lectionary the fourth Sunday of Easter is "Good Shepherd Sunday." The Psalm for the day is the 23rd Psalm. The Gospel for the day comes from the beginning of John 10 where Jesus states that He is the Good Shepherd. In order to get the full and accurate meaning of John 10, we should begin by examining the context of the passage.

First of all, there is the cultural context of caring for sheep in First Century Israel. For the most part, Shepherds grazed their sheep on marginal land that no one claimed. - It was sort of like the open range grazing of the stock roots in the pioneer days of Australia when convict labour was cheap.

In order to provide protection at night, several shepherds would work together to clear an area of stones. They would use the stones to build an enclosure to keep out predators. The enclosure would have one opening for the sheep and their shepherds to get in and out.

At night one of the shepherds would lie down in the opening. He would literally become the door to the enclosure. No sheep could get out without stepping across the body of the shepherd. If a wolf or a thief wanted to get at the sheep, it had to go through the shepherd or jump the wall and create a commotion. When Jesus states that **He is the door of the sheep**, He is telling us that He is the Good Shepherd who guards the entrance to His flock with His body. - This is an excellent word picture when we think that it's Jesus' body on a cross that saves and protects us from sin, death, and the power of the devil "*the wolf, the thief*".

When the morning came, each shepherd would call his flock. When the sheep heard the call of their shepherd and their shepherd only, they came out. - They followed their shepherd by listening for his voice. By working with the sheep out in the pasture all day and talking to them, the sheep came to know the voice of their shepherd and they wouldn't follow any other voice.

Martin Luther gives an excellent example of what it means to hear the Good Shepherd's voice in his explanation to the Third Commandment. - He wrote, "*we should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.*" - Those who hear the Good Shepherd's voice have a hunger that can only be satisfied by the Word of God. - They don't see a Bible study as a duty or an inconvenience. - Instead, they see it as an opportunity to feed from green pastures and drink from still waters. They see it as an opportunity to be with their Good Shepherd and receive His gifts.

There is a second part to the context of this morning's Gospel. - When Jesus stated that He was the **"Door for the sheep."** He was speaking to a man who was once blind, some Pharisees, and a gathering crowd. - Jesus spoke these words shortly after He gave sight to a blind man on the Sabbath.

The account of this restoration is in the Gospel of John chapter 9. A man was born blind. Jesus spit into some dust and made some mud. He applied the mud to the man's eyes. - Then He told the man to wash His eyes in the "Pool of Siloam." The man did as Jesus said and received his sight.

All would have been well if it weren't for the hypocrites among the Pharisees. Jesus had performed this sign on the Sabbath and the Pharisees, rather than rejoicing that the man could see, were disturbed that Jesus had worked on the Sabbath. - Eventually, the Pharisees condemned Jesus and, as for the man who had received his sight, they threw him out of the synagogue. By then, the man didn't care because his faith was in Jesus and not in the Pharisees or the synagogue.

Jesus condemned the Pharisees by declaring that, even though they claimed to have spiritual insight, they were in fact, spiritually blind. And because they insisted that they had spiritual insight, their guilt remained with them. Then He began the teaching that we heard in today's Gospel. Therefore, when Jesus said, **"Truly, truly, I tell you, the man who does not come into the sheepfold through the door but climbs over somewhere else is a thief and a robber."** He was speaking directly to the Pharisees who condemned Him and who had thrown the man out of the synagogue. He was saying that they were the thieves and robbers.

The Pharisees were experts at taking the Word of God out of context. Even though they memorized large sections of Scripture, they often misused it. - They replaced the true meaning of Scripture with their own opinions. - At another time, Jesus grew extremely frustrated with the Pharisees and scolded them by saying, **"You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ⁸ 'This people honours Me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from Me. ⁹ They are worshipping Me in vain, since they are teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"** [Matthew 15:7-9.] - We still have such false teachers today - teachers who will quote Scripture and then fill it with their opinions - opinions that contradict the meaning of the Scripture they quoted.

There are millions of false opinions out there. - They come in all sizes, shapes, and styles. At first, this might seem overwhelming. How can we guard against false teachings if there are so many? While it's never easy to guard against false teachings, it does become a little easier when you realize that all false teachings

have one central teaching. - In some way, shape, or form, they all teach that you are at least partially responsible for providing your own salvation. - There may be all kinds of rituals. There may be all kinds of teachings. There may be many approaches. But, in the end, somewhere inside it all, you will hear a condition - a condition that says, "When (or "If") you do this or that, then you will receive this or that." It all depends on you.

It can sound ever so simple, such as: "God wants to bless you. All you have to do is think happy thoughts, or do some "good deed" and then He will give you a life of victory and happiness." - At first, this sounds tempting, but then we realize, "I'm the one who has to think happy thoughts. I am the one who has to do something." - It sounds so harmless and uplifting, but as soon as any part of the process depends on us, it's a false teaching. - Don't listen, It's a robber or a wolf trying to get into the sheepfold. - Any system that depends in any part on me will fail in the end. In the end, we all must stand before Almighty and Holy God and give an account of ourselves, but remember, it's not a list that we achieve, it's recognising our Shepherd,s voice and listening to His Word. - Those who depend on self and the opinions of the false prophets will not pass the final test.

The Bible teaches a different way. - It exposes us to God's holy law in all its severity. - A lawyer asked Jesus, "**Teacher, which is the greatest Commandment in the Law?**" ³⁷ Jesus answered him, "**You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind!**" ³⁸ **This is the greatest and the first Commandment.** ³⁹ **The second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself!'** ⁴⁰ **All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two Commandments.**" [Matthew 22:36-40.]

These are the commandments that we must keep in order to earn our own salvation. And when the Bible says keep, it means to keep perfectly. - You've heard me say before there are no time-outs, no gimme's, no have another go, one mistake and it's all over. - If the law were golf, it would mean playing eighteen holes and ending up with a score of eighteen. The Bible simply says, "**For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**" [Romans 3:23.] - God's law clearly teaches that anyone who believes he can contribute anything to salvation will fail. He will lose everything.

Here is where the true religion shines. When you come to the very painful, but very truthful recognition that you cannot keep any code of conduct perfectly, the only thing the false religions can do is tell you to try harder - to make your faith stronger - to think happier thoughts and so on. When you come to the truthful realization that you cannot actually do that, there is nothing left but despair. But you see the true religion offers a solution for that despair.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells you that He is the Good Shepherd who is the door to salvation. When we go before God and confess, "*I do not love You as I should,*" the Bible tells us that God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus, into the world to do that for us. - When we go before God and confess, "*I do not love my neighbour as I love myself,*" the Bible tells us that God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus, into the world to do that for us. - When we kneel before God and confess, "*I cannot bear the punishment I deserve for my sin,*" the Bible tells us that God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus, into the world to do that for you. When Jesus hung on the cross for three hours and cried out, "**My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me,**" He endured the eternal punishment of hell, for us. - The truth of the entire Bible is that God does all the work that gives us salvation. - We do nothing. - God does it all. God the Holy Spirit even gives us the faith that receives this salvation.

Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd. It's He who loves God perfectly for us. - It's Him who loves His neighbour perfectly for us. - He is the one who died for you and it's He who rose from the dead, ascended for us. - He is the one whose body, is the door to salvation. It's He who calls us by name. - He has done all that we need. And He has done it so that we can live with Him forever. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

3rd Hymn: 241,

Prayer of the Church 4th Sunday of Easter

P Let us pray for the people of God's pasture and the sheep of His hand, and for all people according to their needs.

Brief silence

P Almighty God, receive our humble and unending thanks that Christ suffered for us so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. When it is given to us to suffer for Your name's sake, grant that we might follow in the steps of our Saviour, act in love and entrust ourselves to You. - Strengthen those who endure persecution for the name of Jesus, thwart the plans of those who oppose the Gospel, and grant to them repentance so that they, too, might die and live in Christ. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P O Lord, our Creator and Redeemer, the culmination of all beauty is found in Your Son. Bless all artists and artisans, that in the midst of a world made ugly by sin, their labours might remind us of the beauty with which You have endowed our creation and our redemption. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Heavenly Father, in the wake of Your Son's resurrection, Your people devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Unite Your people in the one true faith, and grant penitent hearts to all who come to receive Christ's body and blood this day. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P King of the nations, with Your favour behold the Prime minister and the House of Parliament of Australia and all others in authority and so replenish them with Your grace, that they may always incline to Your will and walk in Your way. Prosper all good counsels and just works, that peace and contentment, truth and righteousness, genuine faith and piety may be established among us. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Almighty God, by the work of Your Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace, You daily add to the number of believers those who were being saved. Grant to Your people courageous hearts and bold tongues to proclaim Your truth, trusting that You will gather more in keeping with Your gracious will. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P O Lord, You worked many miracles through the hands of the apostles in the name of Jesus. Hear our prayers on behalf of all who cry to You [*including* _____]. Provide them help according to Your will, and within our vocations, grant that we might help those in need with glad and generous hearts. Lord, in Your mercy,

P hear our prayer.

P Lord Jesus Christ, You still gather Your sheep, and we still hear Your voice through Your holy Word. Receive our thanks for all the saints whom You have shepherded through the valley of the shadow of death to eternal life. Grant that we might fear no evil until we are gathered with them before Your throne; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

4th Hymn: 604,