**The Fourth Sunday of Easter, May 3, 2020, the Rev. David Ota**

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

Today, the Fourth Sunday of Easter is typically known as Good Shepherd Sunday. And today we have John 10:1-10, the first portion. In order to better understand why we call Jesus the Good Shepherd, we have to understand John 9, and the story after today’s gospel lesson, John 10:11-21, where Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd.” (John 10:11)

So, in chapter 9, there was a story of a man born blind, and his disciples asking Jesus, “who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2b) So the presumption was if you suffer, you must have done something wrong. In other words, blame the victim. That was the theology. And for those who weren’t suffering, they created a theology, a rationale for why they were above suffering.

Today, all of us are suffering, some much more than others. And the ones who suffer the most have probably the fewest privileges in society, but it is not their fault that they are suffering.

Jesus said to the disciples this man was born blind so that God’s glory might be revealed in him. (John 9:3b) We know the story. Jesus spit on the ground, made some mud, applied it to the man’s eyes and asked him to go wash in the Pool of Siloam where traditionally healing would take place. His vision was restored miraculously. But that’s not the point of the story.

### So, whether or not we will survive the pandemic. Hopefully we will all survive this pandemic, but the point of the story is not whether we will survive like the man born blind. So, when the man who was born blind who was able to see, the people wondered if it was the same man. Was he scamming us all this time? How could it be? How could it be?

When the Pharisees got to him, those who justified themselves by their faithful and right action, and had presupposed that those who suffered must have done something wrong and sinned against God, they said, “How is it that you see?” Are you sure you were blind before? And the man said,” Yes, this man came and put some mud on my face, and I washed and was able to see.” And they said it was Jesus.

Now Jesus already had some trouble with the authorities at the time. And so, they said this cannot be. He had spit on the ground and made mud and put it on your face, and it was the Sabbath. He is a sinner. He did something wrong. This cannot be. So, they placed their theology over mercy.

And so eventually, the man who had formerly been born blind continued to testify that Jesus had done this (healed him) and so he was kicked out of the synagogue. As I told you earlier in the past this is a story about the conflict between the early church and the religious authorities at the time. Now the man who was born blind represents the early church.

The point of the story is that Jesus came back and went to the man who was formerly been born blind and said to him, “Why are you out here?” And he told him he was cast out of the synagogue. Jesus revealed to him that it was he who had healed him. Jesus asked, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” And the man said, “Tell me who he is so I may believe in him.” Jesus said, “I am the one.” And he believed. Now this is the point of the story. The point of the story is because he came to have faith in Jesus, and in God working through Jesus, and in John’s Gospel Jesus is the Logos, the Word of God, he would have abundant life.

Now the authorities at the time, the Pharisees, didn’t believe in Jesus. And so that is how chapter 9 ends in John’s gospel. And this is where chapter 10 from today’s story comes in. Jesus is talking about the sheepfold. And the sheepfold represents the community of faith gathered around Jesus. Jesus says “I am the gate.” And only the ones who come through me, into this sheepfold, into this community, will be safe, because he is the good shepherd.

He is both the gate and the good shepherd (starting at 10:11). Jesus is both the entry into this new transformed community, and his is also the good shepherd. And by saying he is the good shepherd; he is the one who lays down his life for the sheep, for any and we would say all people who come to believe in him to be part of this community. There is no restriction other than to have faith in Jesus as the Logos, the One sent by God to be the incarnation of God.

What does it mean to today to say that Jesus is our good shepherd? No matter what happens during this pandemic as we go forward from here, I know we all believe in science. We must be mindful of the danger of the novel coronavirus which results in COVID-19. We must practice safe distancing. We must keep our hands clean so we don’t to infect ourselves. We know all this. But there may come a time when one of us becomes ill, one of us gets sick, and just as we looked at the story of the man who was born blind, whether or not he was healed to restore his vision or not, really is not the point of the story. The point of the story is that we have put our trust in God through Jesus.

And when we go back to Psalm 23, “The LORD is my shepherd. I shall not want.” (Psalm 23:1) And we know that short phrase, “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.” (Psalm 23:4) So, the point is that as we move through this pandemic, we have a good shepherd, Jesus who himself has laid down his life.

Now when we think about many over these several weeks, there have been many people (I don’t know what their faith is, it doesn’t matter to me) they have laid down their lives by caring for others. They have followed the good shepherd. I am talking about health care workers. I am talking anyone who has cared for anyone with COVID-19. I am talking about family members. I am talking about essential workers. All of us are in this together, as it seems, the whole inter-connection of the global community.

Now this last week we have become more aware about meat-packing and the result that meat packers are getting ill. We don’t want meat packers to get ill, but we want our meat. But we are going to have to go without meat. They are going to be closing down meat packing factories where beef, pork and chicken are being cut up.

It just reveals how much of our society is inter-connected. I imagine when you go grocery shopping this week, you should only take what you need. If you can as Karen has told me, we will have to become more vegetarian or vegan. And that’s really the way much of the world lives. What I am saying is that we don’t want these people to lose their lives either, and that means there’s going to be less of what we use to having. And our part in this process is to give up part of our life that we are so used to, that we enjoyed so much for the sake of protecting others. That’s what we have to do. We have to keep distance. We have to be mindful to clean our environments. We have to learn to do with less so others may live. That is Jesus the good shepherd.

So, we have people who have literally put their lives at risk. The least that we can do is try to help the whole community survive the pandemic. If it means us tightening our belts. If it means us donating to others who don’t have enough. That’s what we should do. In terms of donating to others who don’t have enough that is what happened in the early church in our lesson of Acts for today.

Last week we heard the lesson at Peter’s preaching 3000 came to be baptized after coming to believe in the Lord. And this community which resulted was supported by those who had (property), selling their property and sharing. Now in the history of the church, this did not last very long. We strive as a community to tithe, but we don’t do very well at that either. But at this time in history, we need to look at our own resources and to do a little better in sharing either our time or energy for those who are at more risk. For those of us with more money, we can share money. For those of us who are energetic and young, (we can share our time and talent). This week I am turning 66 and this is my last service on You Tube Live, because according to the bishop’s directive and to the county’s directive on groups of people gatherings of ten or less, you have to 65 years old or younger, and I will be the ripe age of 66. So I will be watching you guys on You Tube Live myself.

Finally, I want to say something from our lesson 1 Peter for today, the tightening of our belts and the call to suffering. This section 1 Peter 2:19-25 was actually written to Christian slaves who were being abused by their masters. Actually Verse 18 is not here was addressed to Christian slaves. A critique of this was it seems to condone slavery. At this time in the early church, it doesn’t really condone slavery because they were expecting all things to be transformed and changed. The meaning of this text for us today is that all of us if we suffer, we should be faithful.

“If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval.” (1 Peter 2:20)

None of us created the pandemic, but we all suffer in some way, and some people much more than us. So for those of us who are able, we need to accept this time of suffering for the common good. And the reason for this is because Jesus was willing to suffer, the good shepherd for the sheep. And the church who follow Jesus need to take Jesus as our example to be willing to suffer for the world: to accept the suffering that is ours to have: tighten our belts, live through this pandemic faithfully so that at the other end there will be a community of love and grace.

I give thanks for the opportunity to lead worship for this community for so many years. I look forward to Karen leading worship for us, and next Sunday Daniel Tate will be preaching, and Karen will be preaching, and if I am able to do so, you will have a videotaped sermon from me from time to time.

In the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

**I propose to show that like the man born blind whose sight was restored by Jesus and then came to faith, we are saved from living for this life alone when we come to faith in God through Jesus so that we can live the abundant life as we follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd and live for love by accepting our suffering for the sake of the common good.**

**The Collect**

O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people: Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**The First Lesson**

**Acts 2:42-47**

Those who had been baptized devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**The Response**

**Psalm 23**

***Dominus regit me***

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

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

3 He revives my soul \*
and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.

4 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.

5 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.

6 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 Epistle**

**1 Peter 2:19-25**

It is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

“He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

**The Gospel**

**John 10:1-10**

Jesus said, “Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

**In preparation for this coming Sunday’s worship, please pray this coming Sunday’s Collect of the Day and read and reflect on the lessons assigned as printed below**

**The Fifth Sunday of Easter**

**Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14**

**The Collect**

Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**The First Lesson**

**Acts 7:55-60**

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he died.

**The Response**

**Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16**

***In te, Domine, speravi***

1 In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame; \*
deliver me in your righteousness.

2 Incline your ear to me; \*
make haste to deliver me.

3 Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe,
for you are my crag and my stronghold; \*
for the sake of your Name, lead me and guide me.

4 Take me out of the net that they have secretly set for me, \*
for you are my tower of strength.

5 Into your hands I commend my spirit, \*
for you have redeemed me,
O Lord, O God of truth.

15 My times are in your hand; \*
rescue me from the hand of my enemies,
and from those who persecute me.

16 Make your face to shine upon your servant, \*
and in your loving-kindness save me."

**The Epistle**

**1 Peter 2:2-10**

Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

“See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;

and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very head of the corner”,

and

“A stone that makes them stumble,
and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people,
but now you are God’s people;

once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.

**The Gospel**

**John 14:1-14**

Jesus said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”