

**The Lessons Appointed for Use on the
Fourth Sunday of Easter
Year B
RCL**

[Acts 4:5-12](#), [1 John 3:16-24](#), [John 10:11-18](#), [Psalm 23](#)

Psalm 23 provides us with immense comfort. And rightfully so. It's one of those psalms that every time I hear it I am swept away to visceral moments in my past where it was prayed. While it's a psalm that we hear read at funerals or even read at the deathbed, it's actually a psalm of incredible action pointing to our movements- and God's movements among us. Joel Lemon says that when we read it, we can be sentimental- romanticize it- I think for me I still desire to hear it from the King James Translation- but he also invites us to be bold, keeping in the back of our mind the ways that its radical claims confront our experiences of suffering, fear, enmity, and alienation.

So, how can Good Shepherd Sunday be fresh for us? One of the verses that caught my eye in particular this week was verse 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 forever. As I explored this verse more, I heard a powerful translation. That is this: Only your goodness and steadfast love shall pursue me all the days of my life. It feels like the endless search for God can come to end. That simply put, we just need to turn around, because it's God that is doing the searching, God that is doing the pursuing. God is chasing us with a deep desire to be with us in every way.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, and Earth Day, we are reminded that we are all wonderfully and fearfully made by our Creator. It's quite fitting with all the pastoral images- of nature and creation- that these two events fall on the same day- because in many ways it's how we know God's love on this planet. In Genesis, the root for the word

“dominion” when God gives us dominion over creation, is something far subtler than giving us unyielding power. The root word for this dominion is “House”. We are given the extraordinary privilege to tend to the house of God.¹ God invites us to create, and when we’re at our best, we find ourselves being brought into the creativity of God. But when become tired or anxious, we become limited and we think in terms of day and night, while all the while God is painting gorgeous dusks and awakening dawns. There is room for all, enough for all. ⁱ

Caring for creation and the earth does not mean that we care for it in all the same way. But it does mean that we care. In a larger sense, it shows how we are responsible in responding to the resurrection. We protect what we love, just as Jesus tends to each and every one of us. When we apply that thought to our readings today, we realize that in Jesus speaking about being the Good Shepherd, he was defining and describing a moment of resurrection that he brought about. He was telling his disciples and us what that healing meant- a teaching moment in which a blind man from birth, heard Jesus’ voice and his sight was restored. That’s one of the connections with sheep, although we like to make other comparisons, and that is, sheep have the ability, just like humans, to hear their shepherd. To hear the one true voice² and be invited into that immense place of love and care.

What are we moving toward in God’s love for us? These oh so familiar passages can show us the way we need to follow and the truth we need to know. They give us this incredible sense of tension- which I know, why do we need more tension in an already chaotic world?- but they help us wonder how we live and act in the world- and our motivations behind those actions. I want all of those things that the psalmist names

¹ “Redeeming Administration.” Ann M. Garrido

² Progressiveinvolvement.com

for the world- still waters, green pastures, restoration and yet. I find myself aching for more at times. For more certainty. For more fulfillment. For more everything, sometimes we can't even define the more that we desire.

A recent podcast I heard talks about provision. And how we find provision when we follow Jesus. Provision. It's more than what we want, but what we need. Our unquenchable thirst and hunger for more is satiated. Jesus is the Good Shepherd- instead of the great shepherd or the awesome shepherd or fill in the blank of what our expectations are for Jesus. Jesus came to show us the way to have the fullest life possible. To live in abundance. We hear his voice, and we can know him, just as he knows us.

Maybe that sense of freshness for today's readings can come from the movement of God pursuing us. How is God pursuing us as a community of St. Andrew's? In God's pursuit of us, are we comforted? Pushed outside of comfort zones? Emboldened to share God's love? Tended to and nurtured? Held as we weep? God is so good, and as the Good Shepherd, God holds all of these for us. How we understand both darkness and light is how we understand God. There's a time for movement- preparing- leading- anointing- wanting. There's a time for stillness- resting- restoring- dwelling- comforting. In the end though, it's about trust.³ Trust that we are led to refreshment when it's needed and we can't see it. Trust that we will be guided through dark and harrowing valleys. Trust that God is good and wants the best for us. Trust that what we need, is given in abundance. Only God's mercy and goodness will pursue us, all the days of our lives, and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

ⁱ The Rev'd Stephanie Sorg Wing

³ Pulpitfiction.com