

**The Still Point**  
**A Time of Meditation and Reflection**  
**The Fourth Sunday of Easter**

... At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance...

T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*

Peace on each one who comes in need;  
**Peace on each one who comes in joy.**  
Peace on each one who offers prayers;  
**Peace on each one who offers song.**  
Peace of the Maker, Peace of the Son,  
**Peace of the Spirit, the Triune One.**

**Alleluia! Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

**Opening Prayer**

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 Gospel**

*John 10:11-18*

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

**Poem:** Whistling Swans

*by Mary Oliver*

Do you bow your head when you pray or do you look  
up into that blue space?

Take your choice, prayers fly from all directions.

And don't worry about what language you use,

God no doubt understands them all.

Even when the swans are flying north and making  
such a ruckus of noise, God is surely listening  
and understanding.

Rumi said, There is no proof of the soul.

But isn't the return of spring and how it  
springs up in our hearts a pretty good hint?

Yes, I know, God's silence never breaks, but is  
that really a problem?

There are thousands of voices, after all.

And furthermore, don't you imagine (I just suggest it)  
that the swans know about as much as we do about  
the whole business?

So listen to them and watch them, singing as they fly.  
Take from it what you can.

**Meditation**

The gospel for the fourth Sunday of Easter depicts Jesus as the good shepherd, which is also perhaps the earliest image of Christ in art. It is found in murals in Roman catacombs, and was evidently a powerful and important image for the early followers of Jesus. It seems remarkable in some ways that the good shepherd is such an enduring and meaningful image, even in a world where shepherds and sheep are not exactly part of our everyday experience. But it continues (along with the 23rd psalm) to provide direction and hope in times of anxiety, confusion, and loss.

A key aspect of this relationship is the ability of the sheep to hear the shepherd's voice. But how do we hear that voice, especially when, in the words of the poem, "God's silence never breaks?" The poem invites us to listen for thousands of voices, such as those of the whistling swans: "...listen to them and watch them, singing as they fly. Take from it what you can."

## **Questions for Reflection**

What role has the image of Jesus as the good shepherd, as well as the 23rd psalm, played at different points in your life's story? What insights do those provide in your current reflections?

Does the poem speak to you about the language and life of prayer - of both talking with God and listening for God's voice?

## **Prayers**

We bring before God someone whom we have met or remembered today

We bring to God someone who is hurting tonight and needs our prayer

We bring to God a troubled situation in our world

We bring to God, silently, someone whom we find hard to forgive or trust

We bring ourselves to God that we might grow in generosity of spirit, clarity of mind, and warmth of affection

We offer our thanks to God for the blessings in our lives

We name before God those who have died.

Gracious God, you hear all our prayers: those we speak aloud, those we hold in our hearts, and those prayers for which we have no words. Hear the prayers of your people, and grant them as may be best for us, for the sake of your holy name. **Amen.**

Accept our thanks for all you have done, O God. Our hands were empty, and you filled them.

May Christ's holy, healing, enabling Spirit be with us every step of the way, and be our guide as our road changes and turns, and the blessing of God our Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life be among us now and remain with us forever. **Amen.**

***Poem and Reflection offered by: Frank Nowell***