

4 Easter A 2017

Acts 2:42-47

Psalm 23

1 Peter 2:19-25

John 10:1-10



The Good Shepherd
Was a sign of hope for the early church.
The Good Shepherd,
Who keeps us from want,
Leads us beside still waters,
Revives our souls.
Who keeps us from fear in dark times.
Who offers us a cup filled to overflowing
With goodness and mercy.
The Good Shepherd,

Who calls us by name,
And leads us forth.

The Good Shepherd
Was a sign of hope in the earliest days of the church,
And the Good Shepherd
Is a sign of hope
For us, who are the church today.

These are not easy times to be the church.
Perhaps no times have been easy,
But these are our times,
Times when our values are threatened,
Our hopes dimmed,
Our future uncertain.

Times that call for courage,
And energy,
And dedication.

What does it mean to be a Christian
In challenging times?

It means to be glad and generous of heart.
It means to listen for the voice
Of the one who calls to us above and through the clamor,
The one who is the gate,
The threshold,
The way
Into abundant life.

Being a Christian means,
Above all,
Claiming that abundant life,
a life of joy, peace,
Meaning, purpose,
Community, hope.

Being a Christian means,
As well,
Embracing a life that shakes up the established order,
Offers a fresh vision of what matters,
Invites a new way of being in the world.

The story from the Book of Acts,
Of the early Christians holding all things in common,

May be more a fable than a historical record.

Even if it didn't happen just this way,
It speaks truth about our hopes and longings,
And about our challenges.
Community is hard work.
Holding goods in common
Is even harder work.
Maintaining glad and generous hearts
In the face of suffering
Is so hard
it happens only by grace.

This story from Acts
is a picture
Of what we hope the Christian life could be.
It offers us a glimpse,
A sign,
Of what is important
In the good news.

The dignity and equality of all God's children,
Regardless of what possessions they have.
The will of God to free all creatures from want.
The sure and certain knowledge
That the Holy One is present with us
When we break the bread and share the cup.
The unfailing gift of gratitude.
The power of prayer.

The Book of Acts gives us a vision
Towards which we strive,
A vision embedded in our baptismal covenant.

When we become Christians,
We embrace this vision of life.

Being a Christian is not easy.
But it is the way to joy,
To peace,
To meaning,
To hope.

The way to effective action,
To heartfelt reflection,
To glad and generous community.

This morning we welcome a new Christian
Into abundant life,
A life promised in the waters of baptism.
We welcome a child into a life of wonder,
A life of perseverance,
A life of courage,
A life of continual return and renewal.
Every time we bring a new Christian
Into the life of our faith,
Our own faith can be renewed.

And this morning we celebrate
The renewed Christian life
Of those who yesterday were confirmed,
Or received,
Or reaffirmed their baptismal vows.
These catechumens studied,
Prayed, shared,
Wondered, laughed, and shed some tears.
They travelled several stages on the journey in faith.
And because they took that journey in our midst,
They renewed the whole community.

This morning we celebrate
The commitment of all the faithful,
Our entire community,
To seek and serve Christ in all persons,
Through the works of justice,
Through advocacy,
Through service,
Through coming alongside those in want.
When those among us offer themselves in loving service,
Finding Christ in friend and stranger,
They bring him among us again.

Finding Christ in the families
We meet at Family Promise.
Finding Christ in the women
At the residences at Irving Street.
Finding Christ, one day, God willing,
in those who will live in tiny house village.
And, one day, God willing,
In the children and women and men
Who will live in the homes
We develop in partnership

With the Mental Health Center of Denver.

This morning we celebrate
The many ways we come to find
The one who is the gate into abundant life.

This morning we celebrate baptism,
The many forms of affirming a mature faith,
The many forms of loving service.

We celebrate a way of life
Made in the image of the one who calls us each by name.
I am the Good Shepherd,
Says Jesus.
Trust me.

I am the Good Shepherd,
Follow me.

I am the Good Shepherd,
Let me enfold you.

The Good Shepherd was the image
Most loved by the early church.

In the early days of the church,
the Christians of Rome
Went underground,
Fleeing the persecution
Of an oppressive imperial system
Threatened by the radical,
Inclusive, renewing,
Life-affirming message of the gospel.
They painted images on their walls
To help keep their faith alive
In the darkness.

Bread and wine,
Mother and child.
And, above all,
The Good Shepherd.

Not the cross, in those early days
When they discovered the way of faith,
When they formed a new kind of community,
When they faced persecution with courage

And walked unafraid
through the valley of the shadow of death.
In those hard times,
It was not the sign of the cross
Under which they gathered.
It was the Good Shepherd.

The one who leads us through the valley of the shadow.
The one who guards our souls.
The one who offers abundant life.

In the darkness of fear and oppression,
The Good Shepherd
Was the sign of hope,
And strength,
the one who gathered strangers
Into a community of friends.
A community like ours.

We haven't gone underground yet,
But we who are Christians
Can no longer assume that our way
Is valued, or understood,
Or desired by those around us.

The world is loud with other voices,
Crowded with other images,
Torn between conflicting values.

There are voices of fear,
Of anger,
Seductive voices and bored voices.
All of us hear them.
All of us fall prey to the lures of the cell phone
And become ensnared in the world wide web.

This is not going to stop.
It is the world we live in.
We cannot shut the voices or images out.

But we can turn, and return,
Again and again,
To the gifts that have been given us
At our baptism.
Gifts that have been renewed
When we make a mature profession of faith.

Gifts that are affirmed
When we offer ourselves in service.

Gifts that are transformed,
Blessed,
Shared in the breaking of bread.

Like our sisters and brothers of faith in every land,
Those of every tradition and religion
Who offer their gifts to the world,
Like all people of faith,
When we stop to listen,
When we remember,
When we are overwhelmed with awe,
Or joy,
Or suffering,
Then above the clamor of voices
We hear the voice of one who is trustworthy and true.

For us, as Christians,
It is the voice of Jesus,
Saying, I am the Good Shepherd.

Listen for his voice.

Art source: Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome, 3rd century