

Easter 4, April 21, 2024

(Jo 10:1-10, 14-18; Psalm 23; Acts 2:42-47; 1 Pet 2:19-25)

Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Today is the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, and we're still learning how to live into the resurrection to eternal life, which Jesus died to give us. Listen again to some of the verses from today's gospel. Imagine they're being spoken *just to you*, for *your* sake—for *your* abundant life.

**I am the gate for the sheep. . . . Whoever enters through me will be saved. . . . I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly. . . . I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. . . . I know my sheep and my sheep know me. . . . and I lay down my life for the sheep. . . .**

That's the voice of *Jesus* talking, and he's talking about *us*, about *you*. *We* are his sheep, the sheep of his pasture. We are the sheep for whom he laid down his life. His life wasn't taken from him—he laid it down for the sake, for the *salvation*, of his sheep. *And we are his sheep.*

You realize, don't you, that **you** are in his sheepfold? You're part of his flock. Wherever you've been, whatever you've done, you're here now, today, in this place, and you're part of the flock of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. The One who laid down *his* life in order to provide abundant life for *you*.

The question is, what exactly *is* abundant life? What does it look like? It's not what the world out there would have us believe. All the advertising and hype about *gotta have it, really need this, can't get along without that*—that's not it!

None of that is going to give you happiness, or peace, or lasting pleasure. It might *distract* you from pain or worries. It might very well give you abundant *debt*, or *clutter*, or *bother*, or *fear* or *worry*. It could get in the way of important relationships, like your relationship with God. But it won't satisfy your inborn, God-shaped longing for the wholeness for which you were created long ago, in the beginning. . . .

There's only one way to receive that *abundant life*—the only life worth having—and that's through Jesus, the Gate; Jesus, the Good Shepherd. The good news is, everyone here has already entered through that Gate! The Good Shepherd has called you by name, and you are his. In baptism you were *sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever*.

**But Jesus also said, 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.**

Christian writer William Brosend wrote these words: *When Jesus said there will be one flock, one shepherd, he wasn't asking for applications. The [shepherd] position is filled. . . . The trouble is, when you give the task of shepherd and gatekeeper to God, you lose control over who enters the fold (Christian Century, May 3, 2000, p. 503).* [end quote]

Giving up that control, giving up trying to keep certain people out, giving up the gatekeeper job—that's hard for us. Each of us has some one, some certain class or group of people, we want to exclude from the holy flock of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Listen to Steve Garnaas-Holmes, from his on-line devotional “Unfolding Light” (4/28/23): *He says he’s a gate but we make him a wall. An obstacle. A closure. A restriction that limits access to God to the right people. Baloney. Jesus is here to let people in, not to keep them out. He’s not a wall, but a door. Not a fence but a gateway. An opening.*

*Jesus is for those who are searching for God, sheep searching for good pasture, who keep coming up against walls. Fear is a wall. Doubt and distrust is a wall. People’s judgment and expectations are a wall. Religion can be a wall.*

*But Jesus is an opening. Through all the walls of right religion and being good enough Jesus holds an opening. A gateway. He says, “I am your opening. Come in and go out, and find good pasture. Let me love you. That is the gateway to everything.”*

*(5/3/17) Some sheep believe others “do not belong to this fold.” I don’t understand. I have no solution. But I know **we are one flock not in our opinions, but in the shepherd’s love.** So I keep my eye on the Shepherd of Love, and listen for his voice. . . . I’ll let Jesus lead his sheep, including those I don’t agree with. I’ll get to know them, listen to them, help them, love them and pray for them, but I won’t follow them, or ask them to follow me. I’ll follow Jesus. . . . Whatever the difficulty, whatever the consequences, I will follow the Good Shepherd I know. [end quote]*

Our Good Shepherd laid down his life, of his own accord, so that *all* might have life, and have it abundantly. Are you ready to accept it? It’s yours for the taking!

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