

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

MAY 3, 2020

### GATHERING

(Today is sometimes called "Good Shepherd Sunday." Jesus is called the "gate" of the sheep in today's gospel. The risen Christ opens the way to abundant life. He anoints our heads with oil and guides us beside the still waters of our baptism. Each Sunday he spreads a feast before us amid the world's violence and war. We go forth to be signs of the resurrection and extend God's tender care to all creation.)

Thanksgiving for Baptism

*All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism.*

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

**Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism, we are raised with him to new life. Let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning you created us in your image and planted us in a well-watered garden. In the desert you promised pools of water for the parched, and you gave us water from the rock. When we did not know the way, you sent the Good Shepherd to lead us to still waters. At the cross, you watered us from Jesus' wounded side, and on this day, you shower us again with the water of life. We praise you for your salvation through water, for the water in this font, and for all water everywhere. Bathe us in your forgiveness, grace, and love. Satisfy the thirsty, and give us the life only you can give. To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

**Amen.**

### The Prayer of the Day

P: Let us Pray,

**C: O God our shepherd, you know your sheep by name and lead us to safety through the valleys of death. Guide us by your voice, that we may walk in certainty and security to the joyous feast prepared in your house, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

### WORD

#### First Reading: Acts 2:42-47

*Today's reading is a description of life in the community following Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out on God's people. The new community is sustained in worship and fellowship, shares what they have, and ensures that everyone has enough.*

<sup>42</sup>[The baptized] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

<sup>43</sup>Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup>All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup>they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup>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, <sup>47</sup>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.

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

**Congregation: Thanks be to God.**

### Psalm 23

<sup>1</sup>The LORD | is my shepherd;  
I shall not | be in want.

<sup>2</sup>**The LORD makes me lie down | in green pastures  
and leads me beside still waters.**

<sup>3</sup>You restore my | soul, O LORD,  
and guide me along right pathways | for your name's sake.

<sup>4</sup>**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. R**

<sup>5</sup>You prepare a table before me in the presence | of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is | running over.

<sup>6</sup>**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days | of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the | LORD forever.**

### **Second Reading: 1 Peter 2:19-25**

*Doing the right things does not guarantee that one will not experience difficulties, hardships, rejection, or even suffering. Here Christ is presented as the model for our path of endurance and loyalty to God, particularly amid adversity.*

<sup>19</sup>It is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>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.

<sup>22</sup>"He committed no sin,  
and no deceit was found in his mouth."

<sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

**Congregation: Thanks be to God.**

### **Gospel: John 10:1-10**

*Jesus uses an image familiar to the people of his day to make a point about spiritual leadership. Those who listen to Jesus are led to abundant life.*

[Jesus said:] <sup>1</sup>"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. <sup>2</sup>The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." <sup>6</sup>Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

<sup>7</sup>So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

**Congregation: Praise to you, O Christ.**

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### **Sermon Psalm 23 "In the Presence of My Enemies"**

Psalms speak today because they are written by people hungry for God's presence. Psalm 23 is popular at funerals for just that reason. It is attributed to David, a shepherd boy whose king tried to murder him when he became too popular, but to whom David remained loyal; David a king whose own son conspired to steal the throne from him. So let's meditate on the metaphors David used in this Psalm. I'll read the verses from the NRSV first, and then from The Message.

"*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.*" "*God is my Shepherd! I don't need a thing.*" During this time that I am being pursued by my enemy, COVID-19, I have shelter in both Duluth with my husband, and here in Grand Rapids at Sugar Lake Lodge. I have food, my blood pressure medication, books to read and yarn to knit. I have internet access so I can FaceTime or Zoom with those I cannot be with physically. I have colleagues and siblings in Christ at CPC who encourage me with their faith.

"*You make me lie down in green pastures; you lead me beside still waters.*" "*You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from.*" In the evening I slow down with a cup of jasmine tea and thank God for giving me one more day of life as I listen to the loons on the lake. I put my empty cup in the sink, open my bedroom window a crack, and a cool breeze kisses my face into sleep.

"*You restore my soul. You lead me in right paths for your name's sake.*" "*True to your word you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction.*" This pandemic has forced me to slow down. I'm able to do those things that feed my soul: morning prayer, midday prayer and evening prayer; walking around Sugar Lake with my binocu-

lars, or the Lake Walk in Duluth with Paul and our dogs. Breathing deeply, slowly. Slowing down so I can see the goodness of people as we care for each other, recognizing that our enemies are not other people, but a virus.

*"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff comfort me."* *"Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I'm not afraid when you walk at my side. Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure."* I know you walk by my side dear Shepherd as I look back on my life and all the times you were there, keeping me safe. Through my wild 20's when I did foolish things, thinking I was immortal. In the heartbreak of my 30's when I grieved the death of my father. In my 40's when going to seminary damaged my relationship with my only sibling. In my 50's when my last grandparent died. In my 60's when I began to face my own death. You have always been there, holding me, carrying me, calming my fears, wiping my eyes.

*"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."* *"You serve me a 6-course dinner right in front of my enemies. You revive my dropping head; my cup brims with blessing."* In the presence of my enemy, COVID-19, you have given me FaceTime and Zoom, which have resulted in more conversations with my child and their spouse, with my husband, with my in-laws, with my best friend, than ever before. You have blessed me through your good people at CPC who have shown me what loving and caring for each other looks like. My cup brims with the blessing of these people who share their talents and creativity to serve in this challenging time, getting out the message of your unending and undying love for us all.

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.* *"Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life. I'm back home in the house of God for the rest of my life."* God is still at work, preparing a table before our enemy COVID-19. And more times than not, our faith doesn't make much difference. What then, finally, brings the banquet? It is the loving mercy of God, the God who came to us in the human flesh of Jesus who said, "I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly." So when I got a letter from a colleague years ago that said, "I have decided that regardless of circumstances, I will not allow any of life's experiences to silence the song of praise and thanksgiving in my heart," I could, and still can, identify with his words. AMEN

## **APOSTLES' CREED**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection, we join the people of God in all times and places in praying for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

*A brief silence.*

Shepherding God, we thank you for the educational ministries of your church. Enrich the work of teachers, professors, mentors, advisors, and faculty at colleges, seminaries, and learning sites. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Creating God, we praise you for those who maintain and operate farm equipment, for those who plant and harvest crops, for local farmers' markets, and for those involved in agriculture of any kind.

Strengthen their hands as they feed the world. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Guiding God, no one should be in want. Bid the nations to return to your paths of righteousness and inspire our leaders to walk in your ways, so that all may have the opportunity to live abundantly and sustainably. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Comforting God, you carry us tenderly. We pray for those who walk through dark valleys overshadowed by anxiety and overwhelmed with suffering. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Nurturing God, you desire justice for the hungry. Bless advocacy work, food pantries, and feeding ministries in our congregations. May none of our neighbors lack for basic needs. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Everlasting God, your beloved have heard your voice; you have called them by name and guided them to your side in death. We thank you for their lives of faithful witness. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

With bold confidence in your love, almighty God, we place all for whom we pray into your eternal care; through Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## **Offering**

Please remember to mail in your offerings so that Grace can continue to serve you.

Offering Prayer

Merciful God, our ordinary gifts seem small for such a celebration, but you make of them an abundance, just as you do with our lives. Feed us again at this table for service in your name, in the strength of the risen Christ. **Amen.**

## **THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD**

O God of justice and love, we give thanks to you that you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken us to the needs of others, and at the end bring all the world to your feast; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever.

**Amen.**

## **LORD'S PRAYER**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

## **Blessing**

May the One who brought forth Jesus from the dead raise you to new life, fill you with hope, and turn your mourning into dancing. Almighty God, Father, ✝ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.

**Amen.**

***Please keep in your prayers this week:*** Kevin Johnson, Barbara Metzger, Rob Johnson and Steve Lindberg (Streeter Family Friend's & Kin), Noah Klenken (Fred Fixsen's Nephew), Ellsa Sorenson, Cal Curtis & Patty Thompson (Carole Holten's Son-in-Law & Sister), Kendra Rohde, Bill Warner, David Warner.