

Fourth Sunday of Easter

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April 25, 2021

INTRODUCTION

The image of the Good Shepherd shows us how the risen Christ brings us to life. It is the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep, one of mutual knowledge and love, that gives the shepherd authority. In the first lesson, Peter is astounded to see and hear God leading him differently from what he expected. First John illustrates what it means to follow our Good Shepherd as we lay down our lives for one another by the example of sharing our wealth with any sister or brother in need.

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

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

Refreshed by the resurrection life we share in Christ, let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

Water may be poured as the presiding minister gives thanks.

We thank you, risen Christ, for these waters where you make us new, leading us from death to life, from tears to joy. We bless you, risen Christ, that your Spirit comes to us in the grace-filled waters of rebirth, like rains to our thirsting earth, like streams that revive our souls, like cups of cool water shared with strangers. Breathe your peace on your church when we hide in fear. Clothe us with your mercy and forgiveness. Send us companions on our journey as we share your life. Make us one, risen Christ. Cleanse our hearts. Shower us with life. To you be given all praise, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God, now and forever. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Lord Christ, good shepherd of the sheep, you seek the lost and guide us into your fold. Feed us, and we shall be satisfied; heal us, and we shall be whole. Make us one with you, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

FIRST LESSON: Acts 10:25-29; 44-48

Unlike the rest of the year, in the Easter Season the New Testament book of Acts is the assigned First Lesson. While following this practice, Trinity has arranged these lessons chronologically, this year focusing on the story of Peter in chapters 8-15. In today's reading Peter experiences the Holy Spirit's confirmation that the good news of Jesus is for all people not just Jews.

On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him.²⁶ But Peter made him get up, saying, "Stand up; I am only a mortal."²⁷ And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled;²⁸ and he said to them, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean."²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?" ...

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word.⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles,⁴⁶ for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said,⁴⁷ "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"⁴⁸ So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days

R: Word of God, word of life. **C: Thanks be to God!**

SECOND LESSON: 1 John 3:16-24

Jesus' death on our behalf is the clearest demonstration of divine love. This is the very love we share with others, not just through our words but especially through our deeds. In sharing such love we fulfill God's commandments.

¹⁶We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us — and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? ¹⁸Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

¹⁹And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him
²⁰whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.
²¹Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; ²²and we receive from him
whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

²³And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love
one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he
abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

R: Word of God, word of life. **C: Thanks be to God!**

GOSPEL: John 10:11–18

In language that recalls the twenty-third psalm, Jesus describes himself as the shepherd who cares for his sheep. He is willing to die for them, and he is able to overcome death for them.

¹¹I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The 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. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a
hired hand does not care for the sheep.

¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me
and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

¹⁶I 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.

¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No
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."

R: The gospel of the Lord. **C: Praise to you, O Christ.**

OFFERING PRAYER

**God of love, you call us beloved children and welcome us to your table. Receive our lives and the
gifts we offer. Abide with us and send us in service to a suffering world; for the sake of your
beloved Child, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

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