

May 3, 2020  
Sunday email service

Gathering words: Hey, you sheep. Yes, you over there.  
Can't you hear the shepherd calling –  
calling you to come and join with the others  
There's life and love and care and direction here,  
just waiting for you to hear and see.  
So come on in through the gate.  
The Shepherd is waiting.

Opening Prayer (*based on Psalm 23 and John 10*)

Shepherding God,  
bring us into your fold.  
    Lead us beside still waters  
    and restore our souls  
Help us see the way we should go,  
the way we should live.  
    Help us hear your voice calling our name,  
    to drink from the living water.  
    'Lead us, Gentle Shepherd,  
    and give us grace to follow.

Hymn: I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say

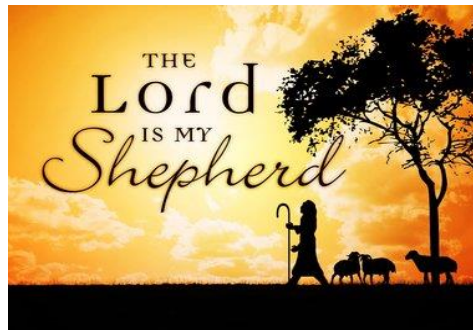
I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
    'Come unto me and rest; lay down, O weary one, lay down  
    your head upon my breast.' I came to Jesus as I was,  
    weary and worn and sad; I found in him a resting place,  
    and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, 'Behold, I freely give  
the living water; thirsty one, stoop down, and drink, and live.'  
I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life-giving stream;  
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,  
and now I live in him.

Scripture:

Psalm 23 (King James Version)

***The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:  
he leadeth me beside the still waters.  
He restoreth my soul:  
he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness  
for his name's sake.  
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil:  
for thou art with me;  
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.  
Thou preparest a table before me  
in the presence of mine enemies:  
thou anointest my head with oil;  
my cup runneth over.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.***



John 10:1-10 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

“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. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

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

**Message: “Sheep Just Wanna Have Fun” John 10:1-10**

Earlier this month in some parks, farms, and yards, in England, British sheep have been experiencing a new sense of freedom. Though parks and open spaces are shut down due to coronavirus, and people are secluded in their homes, sheep have been started to roam about the newly open spaces, in particular children’s playgrounds, and have begun [wait for it] to play! These sheep have turned a playground roundabout into their treadmill. (I suggest you might google “sheep on a playground and watch the various videos). Now, this certainly redefines what it means to be a “sheep!”

Both scriptures this morning refer to God’s people (and followers of Jesus) as sheep. Sheep have been referred to as rather unintelligent animals, that often wander away if the Shepherd is not there to guide them. (Even to a playground to have some fun!) Yet, it seems, given the opportunity, sheep would rather play games than simply wander through the fields. They apparently have a sense of community, a passion for assisting each other, and definitely a desire for fun. Open up the gate, and sheep will find a new way to play!



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Perhaps that isn’t really such a surprise, for our spirit too has a tendency to make the best of new situations and challenges. All we need to do is look at the television and the internet right now to see the amazing creativity and innovation sparked by our coronavirus seclusion. We simply will not be held down. We too can find a “roundabout” way to do anything we desire to do.

When feeling inhibited, or that we have no control over parts of our lives, something happens to our minds and hearts. We look for an open window or a

deserted field and we find a new way to play. We look for a blank canvas, and we find a way to paint a masterpiece. We look for a tin can or wooden sticks and a steel drum, and we begin to make music. We sing. We dance. We play. And we typically do it together, yet when we can't be face to face, we can still find ways to connect with each other.

We may look for an opening in the wall, a crack in the sidewalk, a door never opened, a field never explored, and we will dare to enter in and venture forth.

When we are fenced in, or in isolation creativity seems to burst forth in order to create new hope, new joy, and new excitement, even new forms of connecting with community.

God knows, we are people who will seek new pathways when gates are opened, discovering new ways of living when old ones are blocked. Open a door, and we will dare to enter in

He helps us discover things to eat when our food for living has run dry.

He gives us courage to stand before a common foe and to face it head on.

He keeps us strong when we need to walk into dangerous situations, and deal with unknown intruders.

Calling us by name we are guided to new pastures, as today even in these times of isolation and the threat of Covid virus, many of us are learning new technology in order to communicate – internet, websites, zoom, church services online, book clubs by zoom, or even to check in with family and friends. It is God's spirit breathing through us, and through our relationship with Jesus, that gives us that playful, creative, resilient spirit that renews and energizes us in every situation.

Today, we have the opportunity to go about things in a "roundabout" way, to see things "outside the box" or "outside the rules" and to create new ways, roundabout ways, to "play" the game of life.

To be a "sheep" is not to be complacent, aimless, or helpless. To be a sheep is to be inquisitive, resilient, brave, and ready to explore. To be a sheep is to seek out companionship and community, to take advantage of the freedom and protection

that God offers in order to walk in new and dangerous places, to come face to face with our enemies, to romp in grassy meadows and drink freely beside still water. We dare to enter into the gate that leads to life, to follow the “voice” of Jesus into wild and wooly places, because we trust Him, and we trust that love, life, and play to dwell securely in the future.

Psalm 23 is one of the most popular and most loved of the psalms – one that is comforting, and beautiful, yet also a song of daring and courage, of freedom and joy, of bravery in the face of danger, of victory in life.

No matter how confined we feel, fenced in and surrounded by wolves or unseen enemies, no matter how confused we feel or worried about our future, no matter what threats may wait outside of our walls, when we hear the voice of Jesus, we know, a door has been opened, and we have an invitation to enter in. Or perhaps to enter out – to leave our locked rooms and barren pastures, to go through the gates into freedom, into a new and lush pasture of possibilities, a future filled with good food and the freedom to create a new life.

Freedom, not only from our physical walls, but from our fear, our solitude, our doubts, our worries, our hunger, our thirst, our boredom. Jesus is standing by the gate or the open door, calling us to enter. Do you have the courage to enter in and to discover a new kind of life?

I say, “go for it!” “Think outside the box”

After all, we are the sheep of God’s flock, and in the end, sheep just wanna have fun!

### **Prayers of the People:**

Good Shepherd, in our rush to achieve, in our anxiety, and our worrying, you lead us calmly beside still waters.

In our tendency to get “off track,” as we follow the path of self interest, you lead us gently, on the right paths,

calling us by name to follow you.

Like a shepherd tending the flock

you tend to our needs.

Be present with those who struggle, suffer,  
are in pain or sorrow.

In these uncertain times guide those who are lost, or filled with worry and fear.

Protect those who are in harm's way,  
heal those who are ill,  
mend those who are broken,  
as only your love can.

We pray for all who feel stressed and worried,  
that they might find peace and reassurance.

We pray for all those who mourn the loss of loved ones to the virus,  
that they will find comfort and support.

We pray for our own congregation, friends, and families, those we keep  
close to our hearts, and those whose love we cherish.

We pray for Trudie today as she heals from her fall.

May all our congregations and faith communities  
be places of empathy, compassion and calm in all we face.

God of all blessings, we thank you for all the gifts of life.

We are thankful for our great Good Shepherd, the one who stands at the gate  
of all life's challenges and joys, calling out to us in love, as we pray in the words  
Jesus taught....

Our Father.....

Hymn: He Leadeth Me

He leadeth me: O blessed thought!  
O words with heavenly comfort fraught!  
Whate'er I do, where'er I be,  
still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.

Refrain     *He leadeth me! He leadeth me!  
By his own hand he leadeth me!  
His faithful follower I would be,  
for by his hand he leadeth me!*

*Sometimes 'mid scenes of deepest gloom,*

*sometimes where Eden's bowers bloom,  
by waters calm, o'er troubled sea,  
still 'tis his hand that leadeth me. Refrain*

### Benediction and Commissioning

As you look toward your week, listen for the voice of the shepherd.

With a shepherd's heart, share love with others,  
remembering that Christ's love will meet your every need.

May we know who our true shepherd is, and follow his path,  
secure in the knowledge that goodness and mercy will  
follow us all the days of our life. Amen

