

SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 2024
FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER



ST. JOHN

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Liturgy – Rev. Jacob Nault

Ushers –

(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able
and respond with words in bold print

**ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER
CONCERNS:**

PRELUDE: “Savior, Like a Shepherd
Lead Us” William B. Bradbury

PENNIES FOR MISSION:

Uni-press Kindercottage

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

One: When we are scattered, Jesus our Good
Shepherd gathers us in.

**Many: When we are lost and lonely, we
can depend on Christ’s love.**

One: When we are oppressed, Jesus our Good
Shepherd cares for us.

**Many: When we are threatened because
of who we are, we can depend on Christ’s
protection.**

One: We know Christ, because Christ’s tenderness
has guided us for generations.

**Many: Christ knows us by name. Christ
will lay down his very life for our sake.**

One: Let us worship our Good Shepherd, who cares
for all of us with fierce love.

**Many: Let us give thanks for Christ’s
presence with us.**

***INVOCATION:**

Holy God, you sent us Jesus as our comforter and guide. We give you thanks for the ways he cares for us. Help us be empowered to join him in protecting the oppressed and marginalized. We pray this in gratitude for your provision. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 247**

“My Shepherd is the Living God”

***UNISON PRAYER FOR**

TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:

Shepherding Christ, even as you lay down your life for us, we confess our unwillingness to support the those in need. Too often, we may be more like the one who runs away in times of trouble. We aren't always bold enough to protect the powerless; following your example is rarely easy or comfortable. Forgive us. Help us lay down our apathy and follow your example. Remind us that we belong to one another, and to you. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Beloved of God, receive this comfort. It is impossible to respond to every need in this

complicated world. A full life of faith gives us the grace to lay down our work, take the rest we need, then refocus our energy toward the cause of the oppressed. Rest in the shelter of your Good Shepherd, knowing you can take up the cause again with restored souls.

Family of God, we are forgiven. Thanks be to God!

***GLORIA:**

Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat twice)

(end) One God always here.

One God always here.

SCRIPTURE LESSONS: Acts 4:5-12

⁵ The next day the leaders, elders, and legal experts gathered in Jerusalem, ⁶ along with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and others from the high priest's family. ⁷ They had Peter and John brought before them and asked, “By what power or in what name did you do this?”

⁸ Then Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, answered, “Leaders of the people and elders, ⁹ are we being examined today because something good was done for a sick person, a good deed that healed him? ¹⁰ If so, then you and all the people of Israel need to

know that this man stands healthy before you because of the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone you builders rejected; he has become the cornerstone! ¹² Salvation can be found in no one else. Throughout the whole world, no other name has been given among humans through which we must be saved.”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 23

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SECOND TESTAMENT: 1John 3:16-24

¹⁶ This is how we know love: Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ But if someone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but refuses to help—how can the love of God dwell in a person like that?

¹⁸ Little children, let's not love with words or speech but with action and truth. ¹⁹ This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts in God's presence. ²⁰ Even if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. ²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence in relationship to God. ²² We receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. ²³ This is his commandment, that we believe in

the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love each other as he commanded us. ²⁴ Those who keep his commandments dwell in God and God dwells in them. This is how we know that he dwells in us, because of the Spirit he has given us.

***GOSPEL LESSON: John 10:11-18**

Just to put our reading into context – since Easter we have been reading about the resurrected Jesus appearing to the disciples and friends. Today's message goes back months, and maybe years, before Jesus was arrested. He is teaching.

I am the good shepherd

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² When the hired hand sees the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away. That's because he isn't the shepherd; the sheep aren't really his. So the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. ¹³ He's only a hired hand and the sheep don't matter to him.

¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd. I know my own sheep and they know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. I give up my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that don't belong to this sheep pen. I must lead them too. They will listen to my voice and there will be one flock, with one shepherd.

¹⁷ “This is why the Father loves me: I give up my life so that I can take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from

me, but I give it up because I want to. I have the right to give it up, and I have the right to take it up again. I received this commandment from my Father.”

These are the ancient words
revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen

MESSAGE:

“The Shepherd of the Whole World”

You might have heard the saying, “there’s a sermon in there somewhere.” It’s true.

The other day I was having lunch at Cracker Barrel and there happened to be two gentleman sitting behind me having a conversation about business. These two men appeared to be well dressed and near retirement age. I couldn’t help but overhear parts of what one man was saying; it was almost a lament.

“The trouble with so many business leaders today is that they’re only in it for their own quick profit. At one time people were really concerned about making something worthwhile, about building up a business, about looking after their workers. They would hope that their children would carry on the business after them, and go on contributing to the well-being of the local community. Now they don’t care. They can close a factory in one town and open another one a hundred miles away. As

long as they get their bonus and share options they don’t worry about anything else.”

How true that is I don’t know. But it leads us towards the point Jesus is making here in our Gospel lesson today. The definition of the true shepherd is that he isn’t in it for his own profit. In fact, the supreme test of what he’s in it for will come when he’s face with a choice.

Out in the wilderness to graze his sheep, a predator appears - a lion, or wolf or bear. You can tell the difference between a true shepherd and a false one by what he does. The false shepherd saves himself at the cost of his reputation as a untrustworthy shepherd. The true shepherd shows who he is by being prepared to die for the sheep.

This parable the author of the gospel of John gives us today will come to dominate events all too soon. In this gospel there have been death threats on Jesus for the last chapters. Now Jesus declares that violent death is not just a dangerous possibility; it is his vocation or calling, if you will.

The best explanation of why this might be so is found, not in heavy volumes of abstract theology, but in this very parable, this very down-to-earth picture of the shepherd and the sheep. The sheep are facing danger; the shepherd will go to meet it, and, if necessary, he will take upon himself the fate that would otherwise befall the sheep. In Jesus’ case, it was necessary, and he did.

The strange thing about this is that despite the apparent gloom of this vocation – what use, after all,

is a dead shepherd? Jesus also speaks of the grand prospect that lies before him in another part of the same calling. Any idea what that might be?

Jesus is not going to rest content with delivering the present sheep from the danger they face. He is going to enlarge the flock considerably by bringing in a whole lot of very different sheep, as it says in verse 16. What is he talking about?

The original “sheep” are the people of Israel. Jesus is calling them, and those from among his Jewish contemporaries who are ready for this call in hearing his voice, trusting him and coming to him. But as Israel’s prophets and wise writers had always hinted, the God of Israel was never interested ONLY in Israel. His call to Israel was for the sake of the whole world. The “other sheep” are that great company, from every nation under heaven, that God intends to save, and to save through Jesus. The Jewish Messiah is to become the Lord, the shepherd, of the whole world.

Everything in this story is based on that close and intimate relationship which Jesus has with “the father.” The father loves the shepherd, especially because he will express the father’s own love for the world by giving up his life for it. The bond of trust and love which ties together the shepherd and the sheep is the same bond that links father and son. All this should make it clear why Jesus refers to himself as the “good” shepherd. Its all about love; love for God, love from God, love for Jesus and love from Jesus.

May we return that love to them forever. Amen

SPECIAL MUSIC: St. John Choir

“Jesus Name Above All Names”

Naida Hearn

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Most High and holy One who inhabits eternity, in Christ you have come down to those who are contrite and humble in spirit. By the grace of the Holy Spirit help us feel your living presence. Refresh your people who are overworked and weary.

Bless all who have blessed each of us in some way whether we know who they are or not. If we are estranged from anyone, reconcile us by the forgiving Spirit, that all bitterness and hostility may be removed and the unity of the Spirit be manifest in the bond of peace. Deliver the innocent from temptations too hard for them to bear, and support those on the verge of losing faith and giving up the good fight.

Send true comforters to those who are suffering from the malice of others or by the mistreatment of the careless; any who have been misjudged and misunderstood; and those who are victims of injustice and oppression because of their race, their religion, or their sex. Hasten the day of liberty and justice for all.

Be near, O Lord, to the sick and the suffering. Uphold all who are bearing pain and loss bravely,

both the afflicted and those who care for them. Help them as they have need, and give them reason to rejoice in Christ our Savior.

We pray, Compassionate Christ, for your healing Spirit to assist psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors, and mental health workers who work with those who suffer from mental illness.

We pray for all those workers who give aide to those affected by the recent storms and floods; all the workers who restart our electricity, cut down trees that fell on power lines and houses, and those who give shelter to the families whose houses were too damaged to return to.

Thank you, most holy One, for keeping us in the palm of your hand and loving us unconditionally. We are most thankful for your Son who taught us to pray . . .

THE 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 debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE: 774

Shepherd lead, lead me in your righteousness, make your way plain before my face. For it is you, God, you, God only, who makes me to lie down in safety.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY

Jesus offers us fullness of life, protecting us and advocating for our needs. What will you give to join him in the work of building beloved community in the world?

OFFERTORY: "Shepherd of Love" John W. Peterson

***DOXOLOGY:**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen**

***UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND DEDICATION**

Gracious God, thank you for your gift of Jesus Christ, who cares for us and protects us. With these gifts we return to

you, help us care for others in our communities and around the world. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: 479**

“God is My Shepherd”

***BENEDICTION:**

Today you have received the gift of Christ’s protective, unceasing love for you. Because you are beloved, may all that you do and all that you are be a reflection of that love. Fight for the powerless, help the weak, and provide for the needy, because Jesus provides for you. Amen.

***BENEDICTION RESPONSE:**

“Let There be Peace on Earth”

POSTLUDE: “We Give Thee Thanks”

Janet Rand

PRAYER LIST: Becky Ballard, Urban Baum, Ronald Bopp, Jackie Canterbury, Sue Ganschninetz, Josh Mueller, Marilyn Paul, Syd Safriet, David Seneczyn, Yvonne Weber, Joan Williams, Rosemary Williams.