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Sermon for Sunday, May 3, 2020 - “Passage, Protection, Pasture”

Fourth Sunday of Easter - Good Shepherd Sunday - Online Service
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Our Gospel reading today is chock full of images and metaphors. We’ve got a sheepfold and a pasture, a shepherd and sheep, the gatekeeper and the gate, thieves and bandits and strangers. And, apparently Jesus is both the shepherd and the gate. This is a lot to comprehend - especially because pandemic brain is a real thing. Our brains are just not functioning quite the same in the midst of all of this. Yet, there is so much promise in this Gospel reading that we need to hear and remember. So, to help our pandemic brains, this week it seems good to use some alliteration. Listen for lots of ‘P’ words today as we move through these metaphors.

First, Jesus provides us with passage, a way to move in and out. That language of Jesus as the gate *can* sound as if there is some fixed point we’re trying to reach. As if we can arrive and enter, then we’ll have it made. We’ll be saved. We’ll be secure. And, if we don’t feel particularly safe and secure, we wonder if we really have arrived. Maybe we don’t have enough faith. Maybe we aren’t really saved? Or, maybe there’s something better out there. Maybe we need to keep searching, keep striving, look elsewhere.

A closer look at the metaphor Jesus uses might be helpful. The point of a gate on a sheepfold is not to arrive at it, go inside it and stay there. If sheep just entered the sheepfold and stayed put, they wouldn’t last long. There isn’t enough grass or water inside. It’s too crowded. Sheep have to go out into the world to find green pastures and still waters. They have to go out in order to run and move and live.

Sheep are saved by passing into and out of the gate. They’re saved from danger each time they enter into the sheepfold at night. They’re saved from starvation each time they go out into pasture in the morning. The gate for the sheepfold provides the passage, the way into rest and the way out into pasture and the wider world. Their lives are saved, day after day, by going out and coming in through that gate.

We are saved, here and now, in the same way. We also need shelter and movement. We need to rest in God and we need to venture out. We need the rhythm of going in and coming out. When

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Jesus says he is the gate, he isn't telling us that we have to arrive somewhere and enter and stay there. He is saying in him we are given passage into the way of life that saves us - the way of both resting in the shelter of God and moving out into the world.

Yet sheep don't always go in and out of the gate on their own. They spook easily. They get stubborn. They get scattered. They need a shepherd who calls them by name and goes ahead of them. They need a shepherd who leads them out into green pastures and back into rest.

And, that is why it is such good news that Jesus says he is both gate and shepherd. As the gate, he provides the way into rest and the way out into pasture and the wider world. He provides the passage. And, as the shepherd he leads us into what we need when we cannot get there ourselves. He goes ahead of us calling us into life, calling us into rest.

In Jesus the Gate and Shepherd we are given shelter and protection. This doesn't mean that we will be safe from all harm. It does mean that we are given times of rest and reprieve, peace and well-being as we dwell with God. It does mean that we are sheltered in God and so saved from the power of despair and fear. It does mean that we can venture out into all the pastures of this world in trust and hope knowing our Shepherd goes before us.

Right now, these images are especially poignant when we have to spend so much time sheltered at home. We long to be out and about in the world. We long to gather in this place of rest, of sanctuary where we can see the other sheep in the flock.

As we discern when it is safe and wise to go out into the world, we need to take time to listen to our shepherd's voice for guidance. And, our shepherd is at work to guide us through the words of scripture - calling us to love our neighbor as ourselves and be mindful of those who are most vulnerable, calling us to be thoughtful and wise and not governed by fear. Our shepherd is also at work through the wisdom of scientists, researchers and public health experts who are working for the protection and wellbeing of our world.

We also need to remember that even as we stay home, our shepherd still leads us into experiences of rest and shelter and experiences of engagement with the world. When we feel stuck at home and stuck mindlessly scrolling through social media, mindlessly staring at a screen ...
Still Jesus gives us life-giving rhythms and patterns.
Still he leads us inward into times of worship and prayer.
Still he turns our focus outward into service for the world even when we remain at home.

Jesus is the Gate and the Good Shepherd.
He provides us with passage into protection, passage out into the pasture.
He is the way we experience the abundant life God longs for us all to know.

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