

4 Easter; May 3, 2020

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Psalms 23

Acts 2:42-47

1 Peter 2:19-25

John 10:1-10

The Lord is my shepherd

The early Christian community

You were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Jesus is the gate for the sheep; the good shepherd.

Good Shepherd Sunday.

Psalm: The Lord is my Shepherd

1 Peter: Now you have returned to the shepherd

John: Jesus calls himself the gate for the sheep; he came so that we might have abundant life.

Acts 2 gives a vivid example of that abundant life.

In this bizarre time with no movie theaters open; no restaurant dining; standing in line 20 minutes before the stores opens, to be one of the 25 people they let in at a time; no way to get a haircut; worrying about businesses surviving the shutdown – what could abundant life look like?

Psalms 23 is so familiar to us, and it brings such a sense of comfort. I looked more closely at what it might be saying about an attitude of abundance versus scarcity. Here is what I found:

I shall not be in want: when I realize that what I want is often not what I need.

The Lord revives my soul: even when my faith waivers, or I forget about God in the midst of tackling the challenges of our Covid-time limitations.

I shall fear no evil: but instead will trust that God does protect me when I cannot protect myself. This doesn't mean to not use our heads, and not take good care of ourselves and each other, but know that God IS alongside us.

My cup is running over: says that I will not give in to a mindset of scarcity. I am blessed with daily phone calls from our daughters; emails and text from church family; ideas about Zoom coffee hour and Bible studies; people volunteering to help set up a video system for recording services when we have readers and musicians and more clergy than me here. (I miss Rev Ardyss & Dcn Tina!)

I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever: Wherever I call home – in the moment – wherever I am - will be God's home.

This exercise has given me a new way to look at the very familiar words of the 23rd Psalm. I have a better sense of this being abundant life; because of the faith that is in me.

When I read the passage in John about Jesus being the Gate, it reminded me that John includes seven different 'I am' statements, of Jesus describing himself:

The Bread of Life

The Light of the World

The Gate

The Good Shepherd

The Resurrection and the Life

The Way and the Truth and the Life

The True Vine

Some people interpret these metaphors as Jesus' exclusive access to God. But let me offer another perspective on the role Jesus plays in access to God.

I have talked with many people over the years, long before my being ordained as a priest, who longed for a sense that there is something more to life – to our existence – than our job, our financial stresses, the hard work of making relationships work, concern about our health or loved ones' health... If only it was clearer, more obvious how to know God; to feel God's active presence.

Jesus is the human being whom God sent – God the Son, that part of the full nature of God – who became the human teacher to model for us the abundant life God wants for us. A life guided by love for God and love for each other.

Jesus made it very clear in his words written for us in the Bible.

"I and the Father are one."

"I am in the Father and the Father is in me."

"The glory that you have given me, I have given to them, so that they may be one, as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one..."

By our learning the 'voice' of Jesus, we learn the personality of Jesus. By learning the personality of Jesus, we Christians believe that we are learning the personality of God.

Just before his ascension back to the Father, Jesus stated that we are to go into the whole world, teaching the world what he has commanded us to do. That Great Commission says that Jesus-the-Gate is inclusive invitation to the whole world.

If we want that sense of living an abundant life, get to know God.

If we don't know God, meet Jesus.

If we don't know Jesus, learn about him, so we can know God.

If we don't feel connected to God, believe that God's ultimate goal for humanity is for us to be in a fatherly / loving parent – to - child relationship with the Creator.

That was at the core of Jesus' message to us.

image

As you look at the image of sheep going through the gate, please notice that EVERY sheep is finding its way to the gate. None is wandering some other way.

Are there times you feel you are wandering off course? Remember the Acts 2 church. They kept learning from the Apostles teaching; they stayed in fellowship with others on the same faith journey; they broke bread together (which points to blessing, sharing the meal, sharing God's abundance); and they prayed together.

Jesus is our gate. If we want to know the personality and nature of God, Jesus is how we can learn. Jesus has clearly stated that what he taught us is what the Father wanted us to learn. **If we jump the fence; if we go around the gate, we miss the knowledge of the true personality of God.** (I believe that everybody gets their chance to stand before God, ask and get answers, and make a decision for God or not. But **what a loss to not live the abundant life NOW.**)

Our Shelter in Place has now become a Stay at Home order here in San Benito County. Either way, the stress level is understandably still high. But do not forget the promise of abundant life from the Lord our Shepherd;

Do not forget your faith in the Love of God;

Do not forget your confidence in Jesus – the Gate for the Sheep

Let's keep exercising our faith muscles,
remembering the promises of our Christian faith.