

John 10:1-10 Sheep's Gate Easter 4A 2020

Today's first reading wasn't from the Hebrew Bible, as it usually is, but rather from Acts. Acts is believed to have been written by the author of the Gospel of Luke, taking up where it leaves off and as the story of the development of the early church after the resurrection.

And, it contains that bit about the early Christians selling all their belongings, giving them to the group, to be distributed as needed.

In other words, the early Christians are described as sharing everything, and taking care of each other in a selfless way.

Trusting and depending on each other completely.

I know that example can cause me to be uneasy.

We only hear it once every three years,

and it's put with that familiar psalm that describes the Lord as our shepherd.

The lectionary was put together with a great deal of deliberation.

And, in these days of isolation and hoping that you are all okay -- fear creeps in.

In thinking about what makes it hard for me to imagine giving everything to my church community, that reluctance is certainly about fear.

Fear as opposite of trust. How much do we really trust each other?

The 23rd Psalm is about trust.

About knowing that with our Lord as our shepherd we shall not want.

In today's gospel John mixes his metaphors with Jesus as shepherd as well as the gate..

It is interesting today that Jesus, our good shepherd,

does not describe himself as the gatekeeper necessarily, but rather as the gate itself.

Not as the one who decides who gets in and who doesn't.

But rather as a welcoming, open way to him. None of us needs to beg to be let in.

Jesus keeping us safe. And giving us all we need.

And so I find myself wondering now just how my life would be different if I lived believing and trusting that Christ is all I need.

Like a sheep who knows it needs its shepherd and that is enough.

One of these days, we will be able to safely gather together. I **so** look forward to that! I also notice that, as I consider it, I notice that a bit of fear is entering my joy. There is a certain comfort in remaining in my little world, safely cocooned and not engaging with the horrible problems and sadness going on in the world – even as I worry about you all.

How will we gather? Will we have to wear masks for years?

When and how will we be able to celebrate Holy Eucharist?

What would it be like if I trusted Christ as a sheep trusts its shepherd?

The 23rd Psalm is always deeply comforting --
as is the last sentence in today's gospel passage.

'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

When we trust God as sheep trust their shepherd, and we follow Christ through that gate, we live into the heart of the Gospel; that is, that resurrection promise of life and possibility and potential and peace. That we are not only saved from something, like sin, but also for something, for life in all its abundance here and now.

Abundant life isn't defined by Jesus, but this sentence comes after the healing of the man born blind. For the man born blind, abundant life is sight. It is release from dependence. It is freedom and light and new opportunity.

This, in turn, invites us to imagine that abundant life is highly contextual. For the blind man it is sight. For the single parent it might be companionship and help. For the bullied teen it might be acceptance and an advocate. For some neighborhoods it might be dignity and the chance of self-determination. For the retiree, it might be involvement in a worthwhile cause. For us, now, it may involve release from social isolation and the comfort and joy of relationships.

Anyway, abundant life looks different in different places, times of our lives, and to different people, but it always manifests itself as a response to whatever takes away our inheritance of life, purpose, and joy.

And, to follow our Christ is the way to this abundant life.
The image of the gate asks of us effort, imagination and personal involvement.
We are to find the gate and pass through it.
Jesus is the life, we are to live in his way and dwell in his truth,
that we may live his risen life.

We are to be a people who measure things by the resurrection life of Jesus –
knowing each other; sustaining each other; bearing with each other;
encouraging each other; learning from each other; supporting each other –
in joy as well as trouble.
We need each other to see each other through the gate.

The way the good shepherd is the way of love, not fear.
The way of the Good Shepherd is the way of the open arms and heart.

++ Our Episcopal Bishop has appointed a Task Force for reopening Arizona churches.
It began meeting a week or so ago, and is making a plan,
depending on various medical and scientific resources,
for a safe way for us to begin to gather again.
I don't know how the extension of our stay-at-home order will affect their work,
but I can't wait to hear when that may happen!