



THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER  
GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY

May 3, 2020

North Congregational Church  
New Hartford, Connecticut

WORSHIP ON THE EIGHTH SUNDAY  
THAT WE ARE NOT GATHERING IN OUR SANCTUARY  
BECAUSE WE WISH TO HONOR THE GOVERNOR'S REQUEST FOR  
PHYSICAL DISTANCING IN ORDER TO PREVENT THE SPREAD  
OF THE CORONAVIRUS THAT IS TRAVELING AROUND THE GLOBE

BEFORE YOU BEGIN THE SERVICE: The first Sunday of every month it is our tradition to celebrate The Sacrament of Holy Communion. This is the second communion Sunday that we will not be sharing the sacrament together in the sanctuary. But during this period when the loving thing for us to do is to remain sheltered in place when possible, included in this worship service is a liturgy that will enable you to celebrate communion in your home. Even if you are alone, I hope that you will read the words and receive the elements.

Before the time of the service you will need to obtain some bread, and a cup or cups of juice — perhaps grape or cranberry. You may prepare the table with a cloth, perhaps light a candle, and make the gathering place special and holy in whatever way you wish.

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FOR YOUR MEDITATION

*I believe I need a shepherd...  
Because I am sometimes timid and at other times overconfident,  
because I often don't know the best path yet pretend I do...  
because I rush into dead ends...  
because the things I crave may not be what is good for me,  
I need a shepherd.*

*I trust Jesus, the Good Shepherd,  
his wisdom inspires opportunities for discoveries that lead to progress and healing,  
his words comfort me when I'm anxious or afraid,  
his arm steadies me when I feel weary and heavy-laden,  
he treasures my name and prepares a place for me,  
and he leads me to people with whom I am to share his love.*  
(-The Rev. Bruce Prewer, Minister of the Uniting Church in Australia, loosely edited and adapted)

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THE PEACE OF CHRIST It is normally our custom when we gather to extend the Peace of Christ to one another. Even though we are physically apart at this time, may you know that peace.

#### INVITATION TO WORSHIP

Let us be attuned to the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who calls us by name, claims us as his own and restores our souls. May we be led beside still waters and assured of peace. May we and all who suffer pain and loss receive comfort. Enable us to be led in right paths for God's name sake. Let us be reminded of God's goodness and mercy that we have encountered in so many times and places. As we gather, may the barriers that separate us from of the love of God and prevent us from more fully loving one another be removed. Amen.

OPENING HYMN      *The King of Love My Shepherd Is*      Tune: ST. COLUMBIA  
<https://youtu.be/6ea7VFyn9to>

#### SCRIPTURE LESSONS

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;  
he restores my soul.  
He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I fear no evil;  
for you are with me;

your rod and your staff—  
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
my whole life long.

John 10: 1-10

“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. <sup>3</sup>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.”

MUSICAL MEDITATION *The Lord is My Shepherd*, from *Requiem*, by John Rutter  
<https://youtu.be/iUZTVSnLDN8>

MEDITATION      Good and Thieving Shepherds      The Rev. Marcia Lynn  
Cox

“I am the Good Shepherd,” the author of the Gospel of John, has Jesus declare in verses 11-18 of the 10th chapter of the Book of John.

This is one of the (7) I AM sayings of Jesus in the gospel of John...and only in the gospel of John, the latest of the (4) gospels, written at least 60 years of the death of Jesus.

None of the three other gospel writers have Jesus speaking in such a way about himself.

I tend to think that these I AM sayings were more of the author’s poetic way of

expressing his understanding of Jesus...rather than a declaration that Jesus actually made about himself.

Jesus as the Good Shepherd is a powerful image, one that has been captured in paintings and in stained glass, adorning the windows of countless churches. We are blessed by, and very fond of, the beautiful Good Shepherd window in our sanctuary. (You can see a photo of it on our church website.)

Most of us, I imagine, are not acquainted with sheep or shepherding, because it is not a common occupation, at least in New England today.

But it was a familiar frame of reference in Biblical times. The word "sheep" is found 163 times in the Hebrew Bible, 40 times in the New Testament.

Most of us also don't like to think of ourselves as sheepish... or as needing to be led. Certainly not in this age of independent thinking.

Here are some of the characteristics of sheep that perhaps we willful and self-sufficient Americans likely don't wish to claim.

- Sheep are timid and nervous by nature; they are easily frightened, and so they have a tendency to flock together.
- They have a knack of huddling together and wherever one goes, others follow.
- About one-third of a sheep's life is spent in ruminating.
- Sheep cannot get up when they are lying on their back and need help to get up.

The image of sheep reminds us, for better or worse, of our need for two things: comfort and guidance

Whether or not we like to admit it, no matter what our age, we all need to be cared for and comforted, in the way that a shepherd comforts and cares for the sheep.

It is no wonder that an artistic rendering of Jesus cradling a lamb in his arms holds such meaning for us.

The author of the gospel of John likely knew the Twenty Third Psalm, dare I say the most beloved passages in scripture, in which God is identified as a shepherd.

In this Psalm, we are given everything we need, we are led to pleasant places: to green pastures and beside still waters, which are restorative.

God is said in this psalm to protect us, and calm our fears, no matter how dark the

journey, even through the valley of the shadow of death. It's no wonder that this is requested and read at so many funerals and memorial services.

Lutheran pastor and author John M. Braaten tells the story of an American tourist who was traveling in the Middle East.

He came upon several shepherds whose flocks had intermingled while drinking water from a brook. After an exchange of greetings, one of the shepherds turned toward the sheep and called out, "Manah. Manah. Manah." (Manah means "follow me" in Arabic.) Immediately his sheep separated themselves from the rest and followed him.

Then one of the two remaining shepherds called out, "Manah. Manah." and his sheep left the common flock to follow him. The traveler then said to the third shepherd, "I would like to try that. Let me put on your cloak and turban and see if I can get the rest of the sheep to follow me."

The shepherd smiled knowingly as the traveler wrapped himself in the cloak, put the turban on his head and called out, "Manah. Manah." The sheep did not respond to the stranger's voice. Not one of them moved toward him. "Will the sheep ever follow someone other than you?" The traveler asked.

"Oh yes," the shepherd replied, "sometimes a sheep gets sick, and then it will follow anyone." (John M. Braaten, *The Greatest Wonder of All*, CSS Publishing)

If sheep will follow anyone, it is critical for their well-being that the shepherd who is leading and caring for them, have their best interests at heart.

Here is a brief job description of a shepherd:

"A shepherd's primary responsibility is the safety and welfare of the flock. The shepherd will graze the animals, herding them to areas of good forage, and keeping a watchful eye out for poisonous plants.

As the sheep eat all the forage in an area, the shepherd will move both the sheep and his living quarters to fresh ranges. bring them to a safe area each night.

Many shepherds must be on call for their animals around the clock. They are often responsible for minor injuries or basic medical treatment, especially since they work in isolated areas far from veterinary services. They must also be monitored during the lambing process. During lambing season, the shepherd will make frequent checks on the ewes at all hours of the day and night, and may assist the ewe if birthing problems occur."

(-Beth Greenwood is a registered nurse and writer and holds an Associate of Science in nursing from Shasta College and is a graduate of the California HealthCare Foundation Health Care Leadership Program)

We welcome comfort, but our need for guidance, however, is one that we may not so readily accept. More and more, it seems me, we Americans especially resist learning, or being told, or even shown what to do. In a word, we don't like being led.

But once we are clear about...as the saying goes...WHO we are and WHOSE we are, we will know who to trust, who to follow. And, we are reminded in the 23rd Psalm, that God leads us on right paths, and as humans, to do good things in God's name.

In our specific lectionary reading for today, in verses 1-10 of the gospel of John, John has Jesus declare himself to be the gatekeeper of the sheep.

If you are a student of popular culture, you know all too well that there are many competing forces and voices in our world that call us to less than healthy pursuits, and we can easily find ourselves headed down wrong paths. Or worse yet, tricked by politicians who promise us that they will pass legislation that is concerned with the common good but in the end benefits them.

“We have seen this in our world, haven't we...and perhaps even in our own lives? Battered by the challenges and storms of life it is easy for us to lose our bearings. And follow anyone who will promise a moment of happiness, a brief feeling of peace or forgetfulness, or a better future,” writes John M. Braaten. (*The Greatest Wonder of All*)

In this period in our nation's history, during this health crisis when we are given a variety of messages about how to stay safe, it is important for us to be discerning about the character and intelligence of the gatekeepers of information. And as we face an election for our next President and other representatives to national office, it is especially important for us to be discerning about who to follow. So may we always look to the teaching and example of Jesus, the gatekeeper of the pasture in which we dwell and a Good...not a thieving... Shepherd. Amen.

#### OFFERING

Although we are not gathering in the sanctuary for worship on Sundays for the time being, the church continues to have expenses. So it would be most appreciated if pledges and offerings could be mailed to the church at P.O. Box 307, New Hartford, CT 06057. Thank you for your generosity.

#### OFFERTORY

*He Shall Feed His Flock*, from *The Messiah* by G.F Handel

<https://youtu.be/VUIO5rse8zM>

## PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, although we are physically separated, we come to you now as one body, members of the community of faith in New Hartford we love so much. Even though we are in the midst of an international health pandemic, those of us who are safe, physically well and have our needs met, give you thanks. We pray for the blessing of all who are good shepherds to their fellows; who foster hope through the work of medicine, counseling, social planning, wise and just laws, and sincere good-neighborliness.

While we may be inconvenienced and challenged in certain ways, we are grateful for, all of the medical professionals, public servants and all of those have jobs that make our lives easier, and even endanger their lives during this time. We are especially mindful of those who are suffering from this virus and those who have contracted it while attending to them and at the same time of those suffering from all diseases of the body, mind and spirit.

Loving God, help us to pray with something of the compassion of Christ in our hearts as we think of our sisters and brothers in all lands.

We pray for the taming of the wolves of terrorism and war on the face of this earth,

-for the end of injustice, neglect, discrimination, and the apathy of those who have the power to contribute to the common good yet do nothing,

-for people who have been misled and misused by false shepherds, or exploited spiritually and materially by slick religious and political salesmen,

-for the removal of the hurts, resentments, misunderstandings; for the rescue of those who once had faith in God but have fallen into empty cynicism,

-for special care of the dying and the grieving; that they may know the comfort of the Shepherd whose love does not terminate at the valley of the shadow of death...

(-The Rev. Bruce Prewer, edited and adapted)

In our own lives, we bring to you now our joys and concerns....

All these things we offer, using the words of the prayer that Jesus taught us,

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.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Most loving God, enable us, members your flock to embody the spirit of these prayers. Through Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd. Amen.

COMMUNION HYMN     *Draw Us In the Spirit's Tether*     Tune: UNION SEMINARY

<https://youtu.be/Z7eBhyevgfl>

## THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

### Invitation

Leader: God prepares the table for us, offering us a feast of abundant love. Our cups overflow with the bounty of grace, for our Shepherd knows us as no one else can. He leads us beside still waters and invites us to the table to heal our brokenness, restore our souls, and nourish us with bread and cup for a life of compassion and discipleship.

### Prayer of Consecration

**We thank you, O God, for calling us into your flock and for the care, companionship and direction we receive. Bless these gifts of bread and cup and us to your service in Christ's name. Amen.**

### Words of Remembering

Leader: We remember that on the night in which he was betrayed, when he shared a final meal with his disciples, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

### Sharing of the Elements

Leader: Let us in our many places receive the gift of God, the Bread of Heaven.

**Unison: We are one in Christ in the bread we share.**

Leader: Let us in our many places receive the gift of God, the Cup of Blessing.

**Unison: We are one in Christ in the cup we share.**

### Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: Let us pray in thanksgiving for this meal of grace, rejoicing that, by the very method of our worship, we have embodied the truth that Christ's love is not limited by buildings made with human hands, nor contained in human ceremonies, but blows as free as the Spirit in all places.

**Unison: Spirit of Christ, you have blessed our tables and our lives. May the eating of this Bread give us courage to speak faith and act love, not only in church sanctuaries, but in your precious world, and may the drinking of this cup renew our hope even in the midst of pandemic. Wrap your hopeful presence around all whose bodies, spirits and hearts need healing, and let us become your compassion and safe refuge. Amen.** (Maren C. Tirabassi, adapted)

CLOSING HYMN  
TION

*My Shepherd Will Supply My Need*    Tune: RESIGNA-

<https://youtu.be/MUeiC1McJEU>

OUR COMMON COMMISSION

Let us now forth into the world in peace.  
Being of good courage.  
Holding fast to that which is good.  
Rendering to no one evil for evil.  
Strengthening the fainthearted.  
Supporting the weak.  
Helping the afflicted.  
Honoring all persons.  
Loving and serving the Lord,  
And rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

BENEDICTION

Go forth this day, especially aware of God's goodness and mercy.  
May the foresight of Christ the Good Shepherd lead you in fruitful pastures and beautiful places.  
And even if should you find yourself in a dark valley, may you be comforted. Amen.

POSTLUDE.  
dall

*The Lord Is My Shepherd*

Go-

The Choir of Wells Cathedral, Somerset, England

<https://youtu.be/yLxdb3ov-zE>

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