

Acts 4:5-12

John 10:11-18

1 John 3:16-24

“You restore my soul, O Lord, and  
guide me along right pathways  
for your name’s sake.” AMEN!

“In the beginning was the Word and  
the Word was with God and  
the Word was God.”

That’s the familiar opening to  
the gospel named John, and  
today we have Jesus, telling people  
who hate him,  
that he is the Good Shepherd.

It’s a familiar title for Jesus.

This section is pretty “smack dab”  
right in the middle of John.

It is just a small section of something  
very large that occurred.

You see, Jesus healed a man born blind  
at the beginning of chapter 9 and  
then that whole “kerfuffle” began  
(Was he really blind?  
Was this some magic trick?)  
leading to what we read today.

All that interrogation has led Jesus  
to speak in metaphor.

There's a lot that he said which might  
make a meaningful sermon, but today  
we wish to encounter his  
integrity and courage.

Jesus, in the face of his opponents stayed true  
to his self and we get to see a revelation of God.

Sometimes I assume that everyone  
(all the temple authorities) must have  
been furious at Jesus to hear  
him speak the way he did,

but surely some hearts, hearts present that day,  
were softened some, cracked open a bit,  
and that allowed God's truth to enter. (Pause)

Surely, you have known a people who had that ability?

People that radiate a presence in such a way  
that it made you want to stay with them.

They helped you think good thoughts and  
live a better life.

It's there and it's real.

I think that's what attracted the first disciples to Jesus.

He helped them become more devoted,  
more connected to God, live better lives, and  
they didn't have to pretend to  
be someone they weren't.

Even the hard of heart had to see it.

Think of what it must have been like  
to be drawn near to Jesus.

Was it the twinkle in his eye,  
a knowing nod of acceptance,  
and presence difficult to define?

It is there even though you and I  
may feel rather unworthy.

There's the sense of total  
acceptance and forgiveness in him.

It doesn't mean that people who don't know  
Jesus won't have that acceptance and  
forgiveness because I believe  
we all know what Truth is.

We all know that the absence of hate will not kill us  
but the absence of love will.

We all know what a quiet morning  
with a hot cup of coffee feels like.

To walk a trail in the woods or gaze  
through a telescope at  
the vast star scape.

How can anyone not think of Higher Power  
in those events and feel the presence of Truth?  
(Pause)

Jesus said, in this section, that  
there are “other sheep that do not belong  
to this fold.”

He proclaimed, “I must bring them also.”

So, we can assume that somehow  
they too will know his voice.

They’ll know Truth when they hear it.

It’s not for us to decide “how” or “why.”

Not for us to judge who is liked and  
not liked by God.

We aren't the Good Shepherd, after all. (Pause)

So, we learn what it is like to be  
the Good Shepherd's sheep.

Even though sheep are not terribly attractive  
nor are they very smart, yet we might  
learn a little from them.

Like the way they know the shepherd's voice  
and follow it and trust in the goodness  
and protection of the Shepherd.

Sheep can't explain the way  
they know the voice, they just  
know it has Truth. (Pause)

I began reading a book the other day  
called "Love Without Limits"  
by Jacquesline Bussie.

In the beginning the author talks of her first love.  
His name is Gus Tate.

It came to be a long time ago  
when she's 6 years old,  
and he was 4.

Her family was Lutheran and his Catholic.

He's awkward and the neighborhood kids  
made fun of him, but she cared enough  
to get to know him.

Their favorite thing to do was sit  
on the old bath mat in the garage, and with  
the help from the magical empty  
tube of toothpaste,  
they could fly off on the old rug.

The towns and mountains they explored.

Look, there's the Statue of Liberty!  
Look, it's the Grand Canyon!

She was sad on the day when they  
discovered the tube of toothpaste had  
been thrown away by mom by mistake.

But, the boy taught her that  
the magic carpet still worked  
without it.

The kids in her class asked why she played  
with someone so much younger?

She'd just smile and say he's a good friend.

A couple years later, the boy's parents  
decided to divorce.

Her friend was going to move away  
with his mom to Kansas.

All she could think of was  
"The Wizard of Oz" and knew that  
there are tornadoes in Kansas.

In the next few days a moving truck arrived  
and her best friend was gone.

Suddenly the most beautiful thing in the world  
is the ugliest thing in the world.

Heartbreaking. (Pause)

Where is God in that or in the other ugly parts of life?

I'm not setting you up for anything, but  
how does the Good Shepherd help us  
in those times?

Part of the reason why Good Shepherd Sunday is  
so misunderstood is because it is so hard  
to understand how this One can  
lay down his life and take it up again later.

How can something so beautiful (resurrection)  
come from something so ugly (crucifixion)?

Even in the midst of people that hated him,  
Jesus spoke of belonging and unity.

He tried to help them see what God was up to,  
but do we ever really “get it” right away?

Isn't it almost always true that  
the understanding of God's hand on our lives  
is only realized when we look  
back on our lives? (Pause)

The great preacher, Fred Craddock  
told a story of a minister friend that  
he and his wife became acquainted with.

The minister had no arms and  
he told them one day about  
the experience of having to learn  
how to put on his own clothes.

You see, his mother always dressed him.

She fed him, she dressed him,  
she fed him, she dressed him.



One day she put his clothes out on his bed  
and said, "Today, you will dress yourself."

He said, "I can't!"

He kicked, he screamed at his mom,  
"You don't love me anymore! I hate you!"

Then, finally, he realized that if he  
was going to get any clothes on,  
he'd have to dress himself.

After hours of struggle he got his clothes on.

It was not until a few years later that he'd learned  
that his mother spent that whole time in  
the next room crying her eyes out.

Something so ugly  
turns to beauty. (Pause)

Let me tell you something peculiar.  
It's ok to do that.

I don't know how to shepherd.

I grew up in an agricultural region but  
there wasn't much need for shepherds.

I do, however, know what it's like to be a sheep.

I know what it's like to be lost,  
undisciplined, and  
quite selfish.

Don't we all have the in-born desire  
to want others to do everything for us?

And then suddenly Jesus, revealed in love  
with truth and action, turns the  
childishness of humanity upside down

by laying down his life while we were still sinners.

Since Jesus did this, might there be something  
that I too need to sacrifice?

You see, in order to belong to something  
we must be connected to it in some way.

How sad it is when so many people are  
not connected to a repenting and forgiving church.

Jesus reminds those of us who are  
connected to spiritual communities that  
there are other sheep who do not belong  
to the fold and He must gather them also.

(Pause)

I don't know why we almost always have  
to have the ugly to find the beautiful.

But I do know the ways we make it through.

It's a matter of staying connected to the flock;  
continually coming to the Lord's Table;  
remembering your baptism;

and to do the hard things even though  
it may not feel like much progress is  
being made;

people are counting on us.

You see, what we are doing here is,  
in case you were wondering, is building muscle;  
recharging our energy;  
and making room for more sheep.

And perhaps most astounding we are here  
to keep this place going for people  
who haven't come into the fold, yet.

And it will be enough. What we need is here.

AMEN!