

“O Lord you restore our souls and  
guide us along right pathways.” AMEN!

Welcome to Good Shepherd Sunday!

Each year, Good Shepherd Sunday comes on  
the fourth Sunday of Easter and each year  
we read three different sections of  
chapter 10 in John’s gospel.

This being “Year C” we have  
the last part of chapter 10 and  
even though the word “shepherd” is  
NOT written in this section there is

talk of sheep and the ways that Jesus’  
sheep hear Jesus’ voice and He knows them  
and they follow Jesus to receive eternal  
life and eternal protection.

The beautiful promise that  
“No one will snatch them out of his hand,”  
is given.

It concretizes what God’s plan,  
through Jesus, has accomplished.

Our section of Good Shepherd Sunday concludes

with the statement from Jesus that  
the Father and He are one.

Note that it does not say that the Father and Jesus  
are the “same,” but that they are “one.”

The Greek word for “one” is neither  
masculine nor feminine.

I like that Jesus and God are  
a “non-gendered *one*.”

This is not the basis for today’s sermon but  
simply one of those thoughtful truths that  
reveal themselves from time to time  
during our study of the text.

Our spiritual reflection upon revelations like this,  
I think, lead us to find there can be  
comfort in ambiguity.

That is, comfort and beauty which comes when  
we are open to more than  
one interpretation of the Bible.

It may not “feel” like comfort, at first.

We are a knowing people who want  
to know what we know and

never be wrong, right? :-)

Just tell us plainly, Jesus...  
don't keep us in suspense?

We are like that!

Are you the Messiah or not?  
We want to know!

To be clear, Jesus had NOT told them  
but he had showed them.

The things he did testified who He was... who He is.

Jesus knew actions speak the loudest words  
but sometimes even actions get misinterpreted.

And the result is that it was tragic  
that they did not trust what they saw Jesus do. (Pause)

It's all a wonderful irony this  
“tell us plainly” demand and  
their unwillingness to believe what  
they saw Jesus do.

Everything behind the scene of this  
section of John's gospel hinges on  
the temple leadership's response

when Jesus healed a blind man  
on the Sabbath.

They were unwilling to “see” the  
miraculous event of a man who  
physically could not “see” but now does.

The healed blind man sees with his eyes  
*and* sees who Jesus is and then  
becomes a follower.

In other words, some who could physically “see”  
remained blind to Jesus’ identity.

Irony makes for a meaningful story. (Pause)

You know what else is ironic?

Some people’s understanding of Revelation.

That the book is to be decoded to tell us  
what’s going to happen in the future.

The truth is the letter we call “Revelation”  
was written to 7 churches along the  
western coast of Turkey.

The 7 churches were “made up of poor  
and marginalized folks that were

trying to survive, resist, and refuse  
assimilation into the Roman Empire.

[The letter] is concerned with unmasking  
the powers of empire, alternative liturgies  
that empire uses to shape and form  
its adherents morally, and those who,  
like the Lamb, stand in its way  
and refuse to worship  
the empire,” and its leader.

(Quotes taken from C. Wess Daniels’ Commentary).

The irony is that not much has changed  
since second century life.

We understand that even today,  
empire grows and flourishes by making us  
afraid of others and shadowy unknowns.

Some of us can also see where the empire  
sorts and protects some people while  
violating and hurting others.

How those powers make scapegoats of those  
who question or condemn those  
that help ones who suffer.

Empires of all generations cast suspicions

about religions that encourage ambiguity  
and speak against the empire's rhetoric of  
an "us verses them" duality. (Pause)

What we read in Revelation chapter 7 is  
an alternative vision of community.

John, the writer of Revelation,  
is told about a community that is  
multi-cultural and multinational.

A community that speaks varieties of languages  
without exclusion of things like borders,  
militaries, or walls.

All of them gathered to sing and worship.

"After this I looked, and there was  
a great multitude that no one could count,  
from every nation, from all tribes and  
peoples and languages, standing  
before the throne and  
before the Lamb,  
robed in white, with

palm branches in their hands." (Rev 7:9)

What has brought everyone to  
this beautiful vision of unity?

It is the Lamb.

“Where empire sorts and protects some  
while violating others,” segregates and  
sows distrust...

the Lamb of God unites without aggression,  
animosity, or force.

“[Unity that] is formed out of freedom that [flows]  
from sacrificial love, non-violence and  
patient endurance.” (2X)

The letter written to these 7 churches speaks  
to every church of every generation that  
requires encouragement to stand apart  
from Christian nationalism, racism,  
and supremacist behavior. (Pause)

This “Shepherd’s Sunday” we focus  
on the Lamb at the center of the throne  
who will be the shepherd.”

Recognize that irony?

The Lamb is the Shepherd.

The One sacrificed is the One who guides/protects,

and calls together a new community.

“And they fell on their faces before  
the throne and worshiped God,” and  
there was singing.

Worship and singing were acts of resistance  
to the division and power of the empire. (Pause)

The irony in Revelation does not need  
to be de-coded as we see the increasing  
divisions in our own society.

It speaks to us as it spoke to generations before us.

Today, we see how some political leaders and  
irresponsible news organizations keep us  
glued to them by dividing us from one another.

Today, we see how they either keep us angry or they  
keep us scared so that their goals of bigger  
profits and selfish power grabs to stay  
in power are achieved. (Pause)

In his book, “The Big Sort,” by Bill Bishop,  
he writes:

“America may be more diverse than ever  
coast to coast, but the places where



we live are becoming increasingly  
crowded with people who live,  
think and vote like we do.

This social transformation didn't happen by accident.

We've been a country where we can all  
choose the neighborhood and church and  
news show most compatible with our  
lifestyle and beliefs.

And we are living with the consequences of  
this way-of-life segregation.

Our country has become so polarized,  
so ideologically inbred, that people  
don't know and can't understand those  
who live just a few miles away."

We know it is true and we desire change...

So, we come on Sunday to do what we do...

In actions of resistance,  
we come to worship and sing.

They send ripple effects into us and  
into our community.

We form small groups of resistance gathered

around book studies and prayer groups.

We give money to help those who struggle and  
before we know it we find that our very  
own bodies are walking in neighborhoods  
we once ignored because our  
presence there just might  
save someone's life.

But here's the thing...

Worship and singing are acts of resistance  
that can get us killed.

It is dangerous and not to be taken lightly.

The empire will scapegoat and sort us out  
because it is dangerous to follow Jesus and  
the vision of community we find  
reflected in Revelation.

There is also no better way to live...

To follow the Lamb, a symbol of  
resistance against empire.

The Lamb is the center of our church's liturgy  
and the Lamb offers an alternative  
to the way of life than mere self preservation.

The Lamb binds us together not by force or  
by fear but by following and helping victims of  
oppression.

To usher in a new reality...

To see there is a better way to live...

I read something that Rev. Dr. William J. Barber  
once said.

“‘We’ is the most important word in  
the social justice vocabulary.

The issue is not what we can't do, but what  
we CAN do when we stand together.

With an upsurge of racism/hate crimes,  
criminalization of young black males,  
insensitivity to the poor, educational genocide,  
and the moral/economic cost of a war,  
we must stand together  
like never before.”

Imagine the church today,  
standing together, united by the Lamb against  
the evils of empire.

Imagine us refusing to stand silent  
while the empire sorts people out.

Imagine a community of people proclaiming  
a larger vision of a global community  
here on earth, right now.

Imagine it beginning with worship and singing  
and moving to following the Lamb  
and to stand together like never before.

AMEN!