

A Homily by the Rev. Dr. Renée Tembeckjian
Trinity Episcopal Church
26 April 2026
Good Shepherd Sunday
Ezekiel 34:2-11; Psalm 23; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:1-10

“Good As It Gets”

Being from New York City, I had no first-hand experience of the agrarian life so often evoked in literature or scripture. There were animals – dogs on leashes, horse drawn carriages, and sidewalk pigeons, and there were fields – we played in the green spaces of Central Park, the most famous of which is called Sheep’s Meadow, although no actual sheep had grazed there since the 1930s.

The closest thing I saw *resembling* sheep were the endless lines of people streaming into the subway each day. Everyone used the subway, but on certain lines, twice a day, most were in business suits, flocking through the gate, corralled into subway cars, and heading for the green of Wall Street – international finance, commodities, mergers. Profit was the voice they heard calling. Money was the shepherd’s name and the flock a private club.

Salient images on this day, Good Shepherd Sunday, and salient for these times, as we are increasingly bombarded by the voices of would-be shepherds in this world – those who do *not* cherish the entire flock, but who value and include some above others, perfectly comfortable tolerating, if not outright causing, harm to the very ones they are sworn to preserve, protect, and defend.

Nothing new here: Twenty-six centuries ago, the prophet Ezekiel rebuked the kings of Israel for fattening themselves at the expense of the flock:

Woe, you shepherds who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat; you clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatted calves, but you do not feed the sheep. You have not strengthened the weak; you have not healed the sick; you have not bound up the injured; you have not brought back the strays; you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them.

Nothing old here, either, as false shepherds abound in our own day, although they go by different names: The shepherd of misinformation and fear, the shepherd of injustice and indifference, of imperialism and greed. We have even seen a president depicting himself as Jesus Christ while rebuking a pope for commending the way of Jesus Christ himself. I hardly know *what* to call that, but I would *not* suggest the name “Good...”

...because the Gospels bestow that honored title to one whose care of the flock is marked by service, fidelity, *and* sacrifice...for we have learned that a first-century shepherd would gather in and place his own body across the gate – a human shield between his flock and any predators who might threaten harm. He would stay true to that post throughout the dark of night, willing to sacrifice his own life for their sake.

Imagine a shepherd whose unblemished human integrity reflects divine compassion, whose love overcomes the predator of hate, whose generosity overwhelms the predator of greed, and whose humility transforms the predator of domination. Imagine a shepherd whose Way promises the green pastures and still waters of restoration and peace, in whose fields the old sheep are honored and the young lambs are all fed and safe.

Anyone can claim to be a good shepherd, even the greatest shepherd in this world, boasting about the size of his flock or number of followers. But if you want to know a shepherd's true name, don't focus on what he says, but on what he does. Then decide if that is a shepherd the Gospels call you to follow.

Think of young David -- the shepherd boy who would be king -- a dreamer and musician whose lyric of green pastures and still waters have reassured countless generations, the words touching the soul like an anointing oil running over, an endless cup of blessing:

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul; he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his Name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
You prepared 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 will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.*

Such a dream -- the entire flock of creation gathered as one, guided by a shepherd who remains true even when we are less than true or find ourselves led astray by the allure of false promises. When we wander into pastures of loneliness or grief, that rod and staff will guide and comfort us. When our still waters become troubled or turbulent, that voice will beckon us to safe ground. When we fall into enclosures of depression, anxiety, or anger, that love will place itself across the gate, a shield between us and the dark night, even across the valley of the shadow of death itself.

...because that Good Shepherd's name is Love...

...and that, my friends, is as Good as it gets.

And when we choose to follow his Way, when *we* are willing to carry the staff of justice, mercy, and peace in the green pastures of this world, when *we* are willing to serve and sacrifice for the sake of the entire flock, then goodness and mercy *shall* follow us all the days of our lives...

...which *is* to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Amen.