

The Lutheran Church of the Covenant
“Reaching Out, Reflecting Christ, Renewing Lives”



Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 25, 2021



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.



We welcome you to worship here at the Lutheran Church of the Covenant! We continue to do our best in providing the safest environment possible for you to worship our Risen Lord with your whole heart, even during these COVID-19 times. Here are the precautions we are taking on behalf of our whole community of faith, so that we best care for one another and those we are around during the week.

- We ask you wear a mask the entire time you are in the building, unless you have a medical condition preventing you from doing so.
- Bulletins and individual Communion elements are available for you to pick up as you enter from the back of the sanctuary. The Communion elements are available in wine and grape juice form as well as wheat and gluten-free wafers. We will partake of the body and blood of Christ together from our respective seats.
- There will not be a separate time for an offering to be collected for supporting our congregational and wider-church ministry, and so an offering basket is placed beside the bulletins and Communion elements, for those who wish to give this day.
- We are asking you to refrain from singing, as we do our best to minimize the spread of droplets and aerosols around our masks. You may do so in your heart, where we believe God hears just as well as if spoken or sung aloud. We, also, ask that you continue participate throughout the worship by speaking the **bold** print, but doing so in a whisper voice.
- There will not be a time for sharing of the peace, but we encourage you to do so with one another before or after the worship (while maintaining the physical distancing recommendations of six feet).
- There will not be a processional or recessional of the cross, nor will there be a receiving line with the pastor after the worship. If you wish to speak for Pastor Brad, for any reason, please do not hesitate to contact him through email, text or calling him directly.

We thank you for your patience and understanding as we will always err on the side of caution while knowing that we can still transmit the virus even with the full vaccination.

Fourth Sunday of Easter

The image of the good shepherd shows us how the risen Christ brings us to life. It is the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep, one of mutual knowledge and love, that gives the shepherd authority. The shepherd's willingness to lay down his life for the sheep shows his love. First John illustrates what it means to lay down our lives for one another by the example of sharing our wealth with any sibling in need.

Prelude *Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us* (PAXTON)

*Thanksgiving for Baptism

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at our baptism, remembering our everlasting bond with our Risen Lord.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Refreshed by the resurrection life we share in Christ,
let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

We thank you, risen Christ,
for these waters where you make us new,
leading us from death to life, from tears to joy.
We praise you, Holy Spirit,
for coming to us in these grace-filled waters of rebirth,
like rains to our thirsting earth,
like streams that revive our souls,
like cups of cool water shared with strangers.
Breathe your peace of serenity
on your whole church when we hide in fear.
Clothe us with your mercy and forgiveness.
Send us as loving companions on our journey
as we share your new life among us.
Make us one, risen Christ.
Cleanse our hearts.
Shower us with life.
To you be given all praise, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Text: *The Psalms of David in Meeter*, Edinburgh, 1650

1 The Lord's my shepherd; I'll not want.

he makes me down to lie
in pastures green; he leadeth me
the quiet waters by.
He leadeth me, he leadeth me
the quiet waters by.

2 My soul he doth restore again,
and me to walk doth make
within the paths of righteousness,
e'en for his own name's sake;
within the paths of righteousness,
e'en for his own name's sake.

3 Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
yet will I fear no ill;
for thou art with me, and thy rod
and staff me comfort still;
for thou art with me, and thy rod
and staff me comfort still.

4 My table thou hast richly spread
in presence of my foes;
my head thou dost with oil anoint,
and my cup overflows.
My head thou dost with oil anoint,
and my cup overflows.

5 Goodness and mercy all my life
shall surely follow me,
and in God's house forevermore
my dwelling-place shall be;
and in God's house forevermore
my dwelling-place shall be.

Prayer of the Day

O Lord, good shepherd of the sheep, you seek the lost and guide us into your fold. Feed us, and we shall be satisfied; heal us, and we shall be whole. Make us one with you, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Lesson

Acts 4:5-12

Peter and John had been arrested the previous day because they were proclaiming the news of the resurrection to the people. In today's reading, Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit so that he can proclaim salvation in Jesus' name to the religious authorities.

⁵The next day [the] rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, ⁶with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" ⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, ¹⁰let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. ¹¹This Jesus is

'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.'

¹²There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

Word of God, word of life.

Thanks be to God.

Psalm

Psalm 23

¹The Lord is my shepherd;

I shall not be in want.

²**The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures
and leads me beside still waters.**

³You restore my soul, O Lord,

and guide me along right pathways for your name's sake.

⁴**Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is running over.

⁶**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

Second Lesson

1 John 3:16-24

Jesus' death on our behalf is the clearest demonstration of divine love. This is the very love we share with others, not just through our words but especially through our deeds. In sharing such love we fulfill God's commandments.

¹⁶We know love by this, that [Jesus Christ] laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

¹⁸Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. ¹⁹And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him ²⁰whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; ²²and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

²³And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

Word of God, word of life.

Thanks be to God.

*Gospel

John 10:11-18

In language that recalls the twenty-third psalm, Jesus describes himself as the shepherd who cares for his sheep. He is willing to die for them, and he is able to overcome death for them.

[Jesus said:] ¹¹“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

This is the holy Gospel of our Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

Hymn of the Day *Touch the Earth Lightly*

#739

Text: Shirley Erena Murray, b. 1931

- 1 Touch the earth lightly,
use the earth gently,
nourish the life of the world in our care:
gift of great wonder,
ours to surrender,
trust for the children tomorrow will bear.

- 2 We who endanger,
who create hunger,
agents of death for all creatures that live,
we who would foster
clouds of disaster—
God of our planet, forestall and forgive!

- 3 Let there be greening,
birth from the burning,
water that blesses, and air that is sweet,
health in God's garden,
hope in God's children,
regeneration that peace will complete.

- 4 God of all living,
God of all loving,
God of the seedling, the snow, and the sun,
teach us, deflect us,
Christ reconnect us,
using us gently, and making us one.

*Prayers of Intercession

On this fourth Sunday of Easter, let us pray for the church, the earth, and all in any need, responding to each petition with the words, “abide with us in love.”

A brief silence.

Loving Shepherd, you know all your precious children. Your voice calls us to your loving embrace. Strengthen your whole church throughout the world that we bear witness to your expansive love. O God, steadfast caretaker of the church, **abide with us in love**

Gracious Shepherd, you are generous with beautiful gifts of goodness and mercy. Continue to restore your creation to wholeness so that cities and towns, countryside and wilderness, may abound with life. O God, mighty preserver of the universe, **abide with us in love.**

Hope-giving Shepherd, all the nations and peoples are your heritage. Place into the hearts of leaders and rulers the passion to serve. Crucify any desire to overpower others and give leaders joy in lifting up the lowly. O God, the true cornerstone of all our living, **abide with us in love.**

Nourishing Shepherd, your love flows as we reach out to those around us. As the Holy Spirit, move us so that we lay down our lives for those in need. Help us love one another in truth and action. O God, healer of our every ill, **abide with us in love.**

Saving Shepherd, you restore us to wholeness. Help our Covenant family in our life together and give us vigor as a people of faith. In the midst of challenges and opportunities, fill us anew with the joy of the resurrection. O God, tender shepherd of each of us, **abide with us in love.**

Eternal Shepherd, you hold us securely in your loving embrace. In the assurance of resurrection hope, we remember our loved ones who have died in you. Bring us, with them, to dwell in your house forever. O God, everlasting giver of life, **abide with us in love.**

In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*Thanksgiving at the Table

Holy, living, and loving God,
we praise you for creating the heavens and the earth.
We bless you for bringing Noah and his family through the waters of the flood,
for freeing your people Israel from the bonds of slavery,
and for sending your Son to be our Redeemer.

We give you thanks for Jesus
who, living among us,
healed the sick,
fed the hungry,
and with a love stronger than death,
gave his life for others.

In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Remembering, therefore,
his life-giving death and glorious resurrection,
we await your promised life for all this dying world.

Holy Spirit, breathe on us and on this bread and cup:
carry us in your arms from death to life,
that we may live as your living disciples,
clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Through him all glory and honor is yours, Almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit,
both now and forever. **Amen.**

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Communion

Music Interlude Prelude on *St. Columba* (WILLAN)

Prayer after Communion

Wellspring of joy,
through this meal you have put gladness in our hearts.
Satisfy the hunger still around us,
and send us as joyful witnesses,
that your love may bring joy to the hearts of all people,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Blessing

May our glorious God grant you a spirit of wisdom
to know and to love the risen Lord Jesus.
The God of life,
Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit,
bless you now and forever.
Amen.

Sending Hymn *Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us*

#789

Text: attr. Dorothy A. Thrupp, 1779-1847

- 1 Savior, like a shepherd lead us;
much we need your tender care.
In your pleasant pastures feed us,
for our use your fold prepare.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
you have bought us; we are yours.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
you have bought us; we are yours.

- 2 We are yours; in love befriend us,
be the guardian of our way;
keep your flock, from sin defend us,
seek us when we go astray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
hear us children when we pray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
hear us children when we pray.

- 3 You have promised to receive us,
poor and sinful though we be;
you have mercy to relieve us,
grace to cleanse, and pow'r to free.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
early let us turn to you.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
early let us turn to you.

- 4 Early let us seek your favor,
early let us do your will;
blessed Lord and only Savior,
with your love our spirits fill.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
you have loved us, love us still.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
you have loved us, love us still.

Dismissal

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Go in peace. Share the good news. Alleluia!

Thanks be to God. Alleluia!

Postlude *Good Christian Friends, Rejoice and Sing* (KRAPP)

Praying Together

... for those who are homebound, ill, hospitalized or recuperating: Gayle Agg, Bob Buettner, Alexis Carr, Joan Clarke, John Crawford, Nicole Crawford, Barbara Fossa, Carolyn Frajter, Ken Frajter, Nealie Gage, Barb Gaglione, Michelle Garnett, Rosa Garnett, Jim Gradert, Judy Jones, Dylan King, Jason Lanese, Andrea Lanzalaca, Sara Mendes, Phyllis Nemeth, Bernice Novak, Don Rusher Jr, Arlene Stoltz, Marie Storms, Tim Susaneck, Tom Susaneck, Phyllis Treichel, Phyllis Welker, Linda Wright, Wilma Dancy, Bill Helmick, Nancy Helmick, Robert Lambrecht, Kim (Novak) Leonhardt, Laura Mele, Judy Morgan, Kris Sandor, Bill Wilkens, Eugene Winfrey, the Copeland/Lane Family

LAST WEEK

General Fund receipts for week ending 4/18/2021: \$2067

Lectionary Blog: Good Shepherding

We often think of Jesus as the good shepherd, but most of us know so little about what a shepherd actually does. In biblical times, protecting the sheep from predators was an important part of the job, to be sure. But keeping the sheep from being stolen was also crucial. Yet the most important part of the shepherd's job was to lead the sheep daily to fresh pastures and to potable water. In the passage from John, Jesus fulfills all these tasks, doing so as a means to differentiate himself from other religious leaders. He stands in stark contrast to those in his day (and those in our day!) who value themselves and their livelihoods more than those entrusted to them.

Jesus expresses ownership over and identification with the sheep when he describes himself as the shepherd and not the hired hand. A shepherd's identity comes from his task in guarding and providing for the sheep. The hired man simply gains his income from herding. For the shepherd, simply walking away from the flock or giving it over to a mortal enemy isn't an option (John 10:11-13). Like David before him, when predators

threatened Jesus' flock he interposed himself between his charges and the threat. Unlike David, however, the predators Jesus faced down were sin, death and earthly powers that sought to kill, steal and destroy the flock. And most importantly, unlike David, Jesus didn't expect to survive his pastoral duties. In fact, it was for this reason that God loved Jesus so much: that he laid his life down to pick it up again (17). This was God's command to Jesus (18).

But Jesus isn't just a shepherd in John 10. He is also the gate of the sheep-pen. As folks in pastoral communities know, there are usually three seasons for shepherding in most climates: the spring and summer when the shepherd leads the sheep to far pastures; the fall when sheep eat the leftover stubble in the farms closer to settled areas and provide free "fertilizer" for the planting next year (incidentally, this is one of several reasons why I think Jesus was probably born in autumn, rather than winter. The "shepherds being in the fields with their flocks" usually occurs around September); and winter when the animals are indoors or close to home and fed with stored food.

When the animals were in the fields in the fall, they were close to settled areas and, therefore, in danger of being stolen by other humans. At night, the sheep entered the pens that had only one, often sheep-height, gate. Many shepherds would rest their flocks in the same pens and then have a nightly campfire in front of the opening, using their bodies to block the doorway, essentially becoming the door. At dawn, the shepherds would take turns calling for their sheep. Each sheep knew its shepherd's voice (or whistle) and the tangled mass that had spent the night mingled would separate into distinct flocks as they followed their shepherd.

Jesus himself stands guard all through the times when our defenses are down by being the door to our sheep-pen. Anyone who approaches in a way that avoids Jesus-as-gate is automatically a thief (7-10). He advises that we need only be as wise as sheep (who are not known for their wisdom ...) in recognizing that anyone who avoids Jesus but wants to enter into the midst of believers is probably a threat on some level.

Jesus used his close knowledge of shepherding culture to paint a picture for those listening to him. Like sheep, those who really know Jesus will follow his voice and shun the whistles and instructions of other shepherds to whom they don't belong (4-5). Jesus described the level of knowing-intimacy between himself and his sheep as identical to the way in which God and Jesus know each other (14-15). Jesus' charge to his sheep is that they would know and follow them as he knows and follows his Father.

In this week's passage from Acts 4, Peter and John are called back to the same house that they had visited on the night Jesus was arrested. But this time, they were the ones to be interrogated. Peter's daring response to at least three men who would be high priest in their lifetimes (6) was that the disciples did their miraculous "act of kindness" in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah. Peter quoted Psalm 118:22 to say that the stone the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. All those who caught the reference would have been reminded of the preceding verses that pronounced:

*This is the gate of the Lord;
the righteous shall enter through it.
I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation (Psalm 118:20-21).*

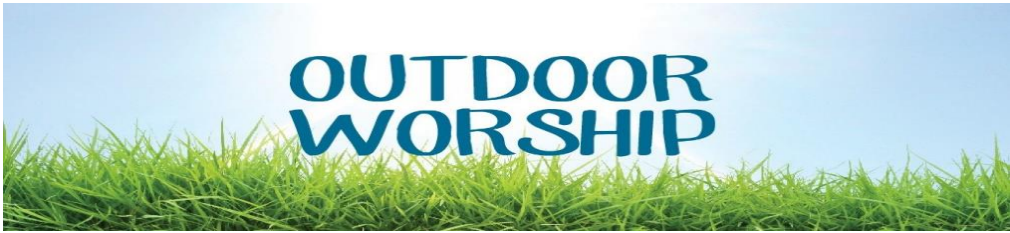
Peter wasn't just saying that Jesus is the cornerstone—though that would have been enough. He is saying that Jesus is the gate of the sheep-pen through which the righteous enter, and that he has become our salvation!

But all the protecting in the world does nothing for the sheep if the good shepherd doesn't show them the way to food and water. Knowing threats is one thing, providing good sustenance is entirely another. And Jesus gave his disciples not just the bread of life and living water but actual bread, fish and wine. His disciples took the lesson to heart and met spiritual *and physical* needs (Acts 4:32-35).

Jesus' kindnesses as the great shepherd are many. He protects and saves us from our sins and the power of death. He guards us from, and warns us against, those in this life who seek to kill, steal and destroy. In addition to all that, his life and power in us enable us to continue his work of providing for his flock with the kindness of the Good Shepherd.

This, and other resources for the journey of faith, available at LivingLutheran.org.

Cory Driver is a minister of word and service, and the director of the Transformational Leadership Academy in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. He earned his doctorate in Jewish religious cultures from Emory University, Atlanta. Cory lives with his family in Indianapolis.



We continue to hear plenty of positive feedback about our outdoor worship opportunities last year, when we first returned to in-person worship following the initial local outbreak of COVID-19. As the vaccines continue to be rolled out across the country and herd immunity develops, and with so much of our Covenant family appreciating how we worshiped last summer, our Covenant council is considering returning to worshipping outdoors starting Sunday, June 6 (still at 9AM) and continuing outdoors through the months of June, July, and August.

We are fully aware of the broad spectrum of current worship practices with congregations near and far away: some are not wearing masks, not distancing, and full-on singing. Some have yet to meet in-person. We wish to continue to provide the safest environment for those who have yet to be vaccinated, including for potential visitors who may come with youth, who are more affected by the new variants of the virus.

If we move outdoors, we would still celebrate Communion every Sunday, as well as sing together! If weather does not cooperate that respective Sunday, we would move into the sanctuary with the same protocols as we have been using so far this year. For those who would prefer to worship inside the sanctuary on a more regular basis, we are tentatively planning to hold our Saturday worships (1st & 3rd Saturdays of each month at 5pm) in the sanctuary (with our same current protocols). We encourage you to take time to let us know what you think by Wednesday, April 28 (in time for our May newsletter) about this plan for worships at Covenant during the summer months. Feel free to contact anyone on our Covenant council, as well as Pastor Brad and Jen in the church office.

The Lord is my Shepherd

Y X J H M I W S I Q J J A V Y X N
R L I F E O U F P F E F K L O V E
J P D C W T B L A F S X F R E S T
S P Q X T I R E D O U W O C T D F
F E T S S H E E P R S E O S E J S
X H P I G R A S S E O V D F Y H B
B C A Y A L K O L V W E Q F C T A
W U S Q S A T L F E U R I O Z L A
E Q T Q L F N Z X R E Y K A Q N C
T P U Q E R Q P D D B D B Z I P A
R M R Q W A T E R B C A Q A D S R
H T E B Z I J V X Y K Y T F Z A E
R R G O D D Z K L T Q Q W U C L A
F U D X S H E P H E R D F P V M M
Z S H D A V I D U Y D E J B U R F
A T T A N O U T G A S T X O I S Z
Y G G A S L U B I B L E O L G A V

David	Bible	afraid	baa
care	everyday	food	forever
God	grass	Jesus	life
love	pasture	psalm	rest
sheep	Shepherd	tired	trust
water			