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| **The Lessons Appointed for Use on the** | http://www.lectionarypage.net/Art/Newshield.gif |
| Fourth Sunday of Easter |
| Year BRCL |

Acts 4:5-12

1 John 3:16-24

John 10:11-18

Psalm 23

**The Collect**

O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people: Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever.*Amen.*

**The First Lesson**

**Acts 4:5-12**

The rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let 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. This Jesus is

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

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

**The Response**

**Psalm 23**

***Dominus regit me***

1 The Lord is my shepherd; \*
I shall not be in want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures \*
and leads me beside still waters.

3 He revives my soul \*
and guides me along right pathways for his 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.

5 You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; \*
you have anointed my head with oil,
and my cup is running over.

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

**The Epistle**

**1 John 3:16-24**

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us-- and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How 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?

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

And 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. All 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.

**The Gospel**

**John 10:11-18**

Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The 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. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I 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. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No 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.”

Beginning in October 2017, Catherine Dubas and I have been in training in a religious Montessori children’s program called Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. We meet once a month at All Saints Sharon Chapel. The set up is amazing. We are learning Level 1, which is designed for children aged 3-6 years. It is this age where children have a wonder about the world. To match their wonderment, God in Jesus Christ is introduced to them primarily through the vehicle of the Good Shepherd, hence the name of the program. The aim is to allow open place and time for a relationship between God and the child to develop; the aim is to have the children fall in love with God as God already loves them. The teaching is not the type that needs to be is explained. The Gospel with all of its positives is read first, nothing scary like death, no talk of sin is read aloud. It is not watering scripture down, but instead selectively deleting lines, editing for little ears. For instance, we just are not going to talk about the wolf or the hired hand in this Gospel to a 3 year old, but we are going to talk about being known by the Good Shepherd. And since we all have this near primal desire to know in our heart of hearts that we are not alone, that we are loved, we are known; a connection is made. Instilling this early in life, to know this divine love is a tremendous; it is sharing Jesus, the God of love and life, with the most vulnerable and little.

When we were at vestry meeting this past week we looked at a passage from Romans 8. We see there too that you are always loved by God. Even if you sin, (and each of us will), that there is nothing that gets in the way of God’s love. You can try to not be available to God, because true sin is anything that takes you away from God, but God is ALWAYS available to you. Our Good Shepherd made that bridge to the Father available, for once and for always. We are loved, our names are known, and that love is never ending.

What that love does is steer us. When we swim in God’s love, when we drink deeply, when we are fed soul food of Jesus’s body and blood, we are steered towards our lives becoming, not the makings of our wills, but God’s will that is done. These words sound somewhat, vaguely familiar, yes?

It is as in Psalm 23. Hebrew is a language that has only two tenses: past and not-past. What Hebrew actions verbs do convey, imbedded in them is an indication of how the action comes to take place. Thus, in Psalm 23, the conveyance of the meaning, “He makes me lie down in green pastures.” is literally something like The Lord causes me to lie down. It is not my own will. I am just a sheep. One could imagine that the Shepherd knocks my knees out form under me. You see that being led by a shepherd, the Good Shepherd, the Lord, God to whom Jesus prayed, is letting your will align with God’s will. It is being led into goodness, even if one walks through the “valley of the shadow of death… Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.”

This is how Acts of the Apostles or Acts of the Holy Spirit through the apostles are accomplished. The apostles aligned their wills with the will of God. To use the words of Martin Luther, “Here I stand; I can do no other.”, They can do no other. Knowing what we all do now about Hebrew thought, even though Acts was written in Greek, the Jewish priestly authorities want to know by what power the healing was accomplished. Who caused this to happen? The answer is simple, God caused this to happen. God in the Holy Spirit by the name of Jesus Christ caused goodness and healing to happen. And where God causes goodness to happen it is where there is love. It is God’s love for us that brings about more love and more goodness in the world. Believing Christ Jesus allows God’s love to abide in us, and that changes us, that causes us to act in different ways. It is “believ[ing] in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and lov[ing] one another.”

And it is the bridge of Jesus between God and us, that allows us to be known and loved, and then causes us to know and love others. “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us-- and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.” He is our Good Shepherd, and we are to be good shepherds. We are loved and worthy, despite any sin, to be God’s, to be love, and to love. There is nothing, no sin too big, to get in God’s way of us being Good Shepherds for each other.

And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love.

 Yes, they’ll know we are Christians by our love..