

“Our Good Shepherd’s Example”
Second Sunday After Easter
April 19, AD 2026
I St. Peter ii. 19 and St. John X: 11-16

Happy “Good Shepherd Sunday!” You can probably guess from our readings this morning why this is the traditional name given to the 2nd Sunday After Easter. Christian pictorial art has long shown images of Jesus tending to sheep. Many churches have a stained glass window with a similar scene, like we have here at St. George’s. This seems appropriate since Jesus himself states *“I am the Good Shepherd.”* By logical extension of the symbolism, those who are Christ’s followers are the sheep.

Now, as with all analogies, we shouldn’t get too overly literal about us being sheep under the care of our “Good Shepherd.” But this analogy might be more apt than we would like to think. Yes, sheep can do aggravating and stupid things like getting their heads caught in fences, straying from the flock, or dying suddenly for no apparent reason. Yet, do we really need reminding that stupidity and death easily reaches into all levels of the animal kingdom?

What both today’s epistle and gospel readings remind us is that however far we have moved away from God’s holy ways into sin, Christ’s redeeming act of sinless suffering and death calls us to Himself *“to live unto righteousness,”* as St. Peter puts it.

We all know the saying, “No good deed goes unpunished.” I don’t know when or where that saying originated, but St. Peter certainly knew doing spiritually good things can result in unwanted persecution. Now, with Christ’s example in mind, St. Peter is instructing his hearers, mostly Gentile converts, to be patient and strong in the faith, even when trying to “do well” and following a Christian way of life meets with derision and unjust suffering. When a person knows they have done something wrong and accepts the consequences without bitter complaining, that doesn’t merit credit in heaven. But when a person endures unjust attacks with patience, that is meritorious because he or she is following Christ’s own example. Of course, Christ’s example was infinitely more meritorious because, though sinless Himself as God the Father’s only-begotten Son, He took on the sins of us all without reviling His persecutors. It was by His “stripes” that we were “healed.” His redemptive suffering enables us to be reborn as little Christs, to be reunited in a merciful “sheepfold” where sins are forgiven and eternal rewards are given to all who believe in Christ Jesus.

In St. John’s gospel, we see that our Lord is a “Good Shepherd” indeed. Previous to our gospel lesson, Jesus has the audacity to heal a blind man on the Sabbath. The sad consequence of that healing is that after repeated questioning by the Pharisees, the now healed blind man is thrown out of the synagogue. The happy consequence is the man who once was blind but now sees comes to believe in Jesus and worships Him. In the values of God’s kingdom as revealed by Jesus,

doing a good, life-altering act for a person in need gives glory to God and supersedes the legalistic restrictions built up around the commandment to keep holy the Sabbath-day. But be prepared to accept the consequences without guile or reviling.

As a follow up to the argument with the Pharisees over the healing of the blind man, Jesus launches into an extended discourse using the figures of sheep and shepherding. Our Lord provides a thinly veiled rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees by equating those who enter the sheepfold by means other than the door to the sheepfold as *“thieves and robbers”* who seek to steal, kill, and destroy. They are the voice of strangers that the sheep don’t know and don’t follow but flee from. In contrast, Jesus identifies himself as the rightful shepherd who enters by the door to call his own sheep by name, whose voice the sheep know and trust, and therefore follow him. Jesus also identifies himself as the door leading to salvation: *“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”* [St. John 10:9] And the quality of that pasture is very good indeed: *“I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly,”* says Jesus.

The next saying of Jesus, which begins our gospel lesson, is a statement of fact and prophecy that is also deeply ironic: *“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”* When Jesus says *“I am...”* our ears should perk up with the realization that a message from the Lord God is coming, and we know that God is good. Furthermore, the fact that Jesus Christ did give His life for the

sake of His sheep is a sign of His divine goodness and prophetic truthfulness. But here's the great irony: In the sacrificial system of the time, it was the sheep who were to be sacrificed as an offering to God, not the shepherd. Jesus Christ has turned the whole world upside down with His radical act of self-sacrifice in order that sinful human beings might be reconciled with God. He is both the Good Shepherd and the sacrificial Paschal Lamb.

In the sentences that follow, Jesus uses the analogy of shepherding with clear implications for our spiritual lives. The wolves of false doctrine and unbelief are howling, eagerly waiting for a chance to infiltrate and attack the Church of Jesus Christ. Straying from the Good Shepherd and His sheepfold can be fatal to the health of your soul. A "hireling" who is not invested in the sheep will run away when danger approaches, but the Good Shepherd will stay and engage in mortal combat because he loves the sheep to death, literally if necessary. Why? Because *"God so loved the world that..."*. I think you know the rest. Unlike a hireling, there is a deep bond between the "Good Shepherd" and His sheep that has a parallel in the bond between Jesus, Son of God, and God the Father. Hence, we only come to the Father through the Son. The Good Shepherd fervently wants to expand His care to bring in others who hear His voice into *"one flock"*—a likely allusion to Christ's mission to serve both Jew and Gentile. All nations and peoples are beneficiaries of His love through the witness of His Church.

That Jesus Christ is the “Good Shepherd” is made evident by the fact that through the power of the Holy Ghost, we can trust in Him to heal us in ways He knows we need, protect us from the devil’s temptations, and lead us into a life abundantly filled with love, forgiveness, and hope. The Good Shepherd is continually renewing us by opening new pastures of unmerited grace. That grace flows to us most especially when we endure unjust derision and even persecution for Christ’s sake. Yes, the life of being a sheep of Christ’s own choosing is never easy. But thanks to our Lord’s life, death, and resurrection, His grace is always sufficient to our need, now and for all eternity. Even now the gate is opening and the Good Shepherd is calling us by our names. Let us once again return to the sheepfold and commune with the “*Shepherd and Bishop*” of our souls. *Amen.*

And now unto God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all might, majesty, honor and dominion, as is most justly due this day, both now and forever, Amen.