

St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland
Fourth Sunday of Easter, April 25, 2021

Welcome and Introduction – The Rev. Charles Rowins

Hymn 596, stanzas 1-2

Judge eternal, throned in splendor

Opening Sentence: The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

Confession

*Almighty and most merciful Father,
we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep,
we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts,
we have offended against thy holy laws,
we have left undone those things which we ought to have done,
and have done those things which we ought not to have done.
But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us,
spare thou those who confess their faults,
restore thou those who are penitent,
according to thy promises declared unto mankind
in Christ Jesus our Lord;
and grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake,
that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life,
to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.*

Absolution

The Almighty and merciful Lord grant you absolution and remission of all your sins, true repentance, amendment of life, and the grace and consolation of his Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Invitation to Venite and Psalm

O Lord, open thou our lips,
And our mouth shall show forth thy praise.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

The Venite - seated

*O come, let us sing unto the Lord;
let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving,
and show ourselves glad in him with psalms.
For the Lord is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are all the corners of the earth,
and the strength of the hills is his also.*

*The sea is his and he made it,
and his hands prepared the dry land.
O come, let us worship and fall down
and kneel before the Lord our Maker.
For he is the Lord our God,
and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.
O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
let the whole earth stand in awe of him.
For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth,
and with righteousness to judge the world and the peoples with his truth.*

Psalm 23 – see lesson insert

First Lesson – Acts 4:5-12 - see lesson insert

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Second Reading – I John 3:16-24 - see lesson insert

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God*

Hymn 564, stanzas 1-2

He who would valiant be 'gainst all disaster

The Gospel - John 10:11-18 - see lesson insert

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Sermon – The Rev. Charles Rowins

The Apostles' Creed - standing

*I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;*

*And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Ghost,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer - seated

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.*

Suffrages - seated

O Lord, show thy mercy upon us;
And grant us thy salvation.
Endue thy ministers with righteousness;
And make thy chosen people joyful.
Give peace, O Lord, in all the world;
For only in thee can we live in safety.
Lord, keep this nation under thy care;
And guide us in the way of justice and truth.
Let thy way be known upon earth;
Thy saving health among all nations.
Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;
Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.
Create in us clean hearts, O God;
And sustain us with thy Holy Spirit.

Collects for Sundays, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, and Rescue

O God, who makes us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of your Son our Lord: Grant us this day such blessing through our worship of you, that the days to come may be spent in your favor, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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.*

Dear Lord, you are our comfort and strength in time of disaster, crisis, or chaos. Surround us now with your grace and peace through storm and earthquake, fire and flood, and unrest of all sorts. By your spirit, lift up those who have fallen, sustain those who work to rescue or rebuild, and fill us with the hope of your new creation; through Jesus Christ, our rock and redeemer. *Amen.*

The General Thanksgiving

*Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants
do give thee most humble and hearty thanks
for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men.
We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for thine inestimable love
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.
And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies,
that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful;
and that we show forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives,
by giving up our selves to thy service,
and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.*

Announcements and America

*My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing;
Long may our land be bright with freedom's holy light;
Protect us by thy might, great God, our King.*

Prayer of St. Chrysostom

Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication unto thee, and hast promised through thy well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name thou wilt be in the midst of them. Fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. *Amen.*

The Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. *Amen.*

Hymn 616, stanzas 1-2

Hail to the Lord's Anointed

Dismissal

Alleluia! Alleluia! Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia.

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, Fourth Sunday of Easter, April 25, 2021.

This is Good Shepherd Sunday.

We know this from today's Collect: "O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people ..."

The theme is front and center in today's Psalm (**Psalm 23**): "the Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want ..."

From today's Epistle (**I John 3:16-24**): "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us ..."

And of course from today's gospel (**John 10:11-18**): "Jesus said, 'I am the good shepherd ...'"

Given this across-the-board emphasis on Jesus as the Good Shepherd, it's tempting to see ourselves only as sheep. But Jesus didn't come to us just to promote his own identity as the Good Shepherd. He came to encourage us, inspire us, to be good shepherds ourselves. Yes, be an obedient sheep, but also recognize your ability, our ability, to be, if not the Big S Shepherd, then the dedicated and effective and creative little s shepherds.

The Church should not be just a flock of sheep, well protected by the Big Guy, but a community of small s shepherds, exercising our own ministry to those in need. You and I, through the sacrifice of Jesus and our own willingness to step forward, are training to lead, not just to follow.

This is not news to this congregation and to the larger Island Community. In a whole bunch of ways, professional and personal, you folks are shepherds as well as sheep. You hold responsible positions. You are raising talented young people. You exercise leadership, a shepherd's duty, in all sorts of ways. I don't see the St. Christopher Family as a flock of sheep. I see you as a community of shepherds.

But, you know what, shepherds are not self-sustaining. Shepherds need nourishment from one another. When you picture a flock of sheep, that picture

might include a shepherd or two. But it also includes leaders within the flock, shepherds in their own right.

Isn't it interesting that ministers often refer to their congregation as a flock. The truth is that within the flock there are shepherds who look after the ministers.

The point is simply that Good Shepherd Sunday is not just an affirmation of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. This Sunday is also an affirmation that conscientious shepherding is the business and privilege of all of us.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want." Think of the times you have needed help and your neighbor has stepped forward to offer that help. And sometimes that offer is the result of you having helped your neighbor. "Mutual shepherding." That's what we're talking about today. Yes, Jesus wants us to acknowledge him as the Good Shepherd. But he also wants us to see for ourselves in a shepherding role.

Now, as we take seriously our identity as little s shepherds, we need to remember that shepherding has a cost. At the Crucifixion, Jesus the Good Shepherd, was stopped in his tracks.

But – and this is central to our Faith - Jesus was not stopped for long. He rises from the dead, and he continues his shepherding ministry, now as the Risen Lord.

What follows is yet another transition. The Risen Lord ascends to heaven. Are we then on our own? No, we're still in God's company. Ten days later, God the Holy Spirit assures us, and we resume our shepherding role, with even greater energy and commitment. The point is simply that our role as Good Shepherds never stops. You and I are now a part of this on-going shepherding enterprise.

That is, if we accept that role. We could carry on as sheep in need of the Good Shepherd. That's certainly true. But what is also true is that we can do two things at once. We can need a shepherd, and we can be a shepherd. Indeed that is the Divine design. Jesus himself illustrates this design.

Today's passage from John's Gospel has this verse: "So there will be one flock, one shepherd." And, what can be added to this verse? "But out of that one flock will come many shepherds to minister to many flocks over many centuries."

And it is right here that you and I enter the scene. It's our day. It's our decade. It's our century. It's our responsibility. It's our privilege. We've been trained for this by the Good Shepherd. He is counting on us to step up to our piece of the shepherding task.

In baptism, we have been commissioned to carry on the Lord's shepherding work. And, as we have discovered, carrying on the Good Shepherd's work is not a burden. It's a joy. We like to be shepherded, and we grow to like shepherding ourselves. And, as we carry on this special work, "we have" – as today's Epistle notes - "boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him."

Our final hymn (**#687**) today is "A mighty fortress is our God." We will sing two stanzas of this great hymn. Here's the second stanza:

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us;
we will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to triumph through us;
let the prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure, one little word shall fell
him.

Here's the phrase we should remember on Good Shepherd Sunday: "We will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to triumph **through us.**"

"**Through us.**" We're not passive participants in God's saving grace. We are not mere sheep. We are shepherds. We are bringing truth to our respective flocks, be those flocks at home or at work or at school or in the community or in Church. Our job within our respective flocks, as sheep, is to shepherd others as the Good Shepherd loves us.

We might not be The Good Shepherd, but we need to be more than mere sheep. Today's lesson from Acts (**Acts 4:11**) reminds us that "there is no other name

under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” We’re the mortals. And, among the mortals, we’re the spokespeople.

And, in our better moments, we fulfill this role. We do it with one another on Sunday morning. And we engage others throughout the week. We are Easter people, and the world is better for it. By our choice, we now carry a staff, just like the Good Shepherd. Thus our motto: “Staffs up!” So, here we go!

Amen.

Lessons for 4th Sunday of Easter – April 25, 2021

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.*

First Reading: 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.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not be in want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures
and leads me beside still waters.
He revives my soul
and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.
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.
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.
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.

Epistle: I John 3:16-24

I 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 see 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 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.

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."

Hymns for 4th Sunday of Easter – April 25, 2021

Hymn 596, stanzas 1-2

Judge eternal, throned in splendor

Judge eternal, throned in splendor, Lord of lords and King of kings,
with thy living fire of judgment purge this land of bitter things;
solace all its wide dominion with the healing of thy wings.

Still the weary folk are pining for the hour that brings release,
and the city's crowded clangor cries aloud for sin to cease;
and the homesteads and the woodlands plead in silence for their peace.

Hymn 564, stanzas 1-2

He who would be 'gainst all disaster

He who would valiant be 'gainst all disaster,
let him in constancy follow the Master.
There's no discouragement shall make him once relent
his first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.

Who so beset him round with dismal stories,
do but themselves confound, his strength the more is.
No foes shall stay his might, though he with giants fight;
he will make good his right to be a pilgrim.

Hymn 616, stanzas 1-2

Hail to the Lord's Anointed

Hail to the Lord's Anointed, great David's greater Son!
Hail in the time appointed, his reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free;
to take away transgression, and rule in equity.

He comes with succor speedy to those who suffer wrong,
to help the poor and needy, and bid the weak be strong;
to give them songs for sighing, their darkness turn to light,
whose souls, condemned and dying, were precious in his sight.