

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

The Rev. J.D. McQueen, II - All Saints' Episcopal Church, San Diego, CA

The readings on the 4th Sunday after Easter always illustrate how Jesus fulfills the image of the Good Shepherd that runs through the Bible, and this year's gospel reading focuses on how the sheep hear his voice and follow.

To fully appreciate what Jesus is saying, we need to understand some things about why sheep follow:

1. It doesn't take much to get a sheep's attention and make him your friend – just some food or a little treat.
2. Sheep have an incredibly strong instinct to gravitate toward their “friends,” which basically overrides everything else.

This is how shepherds can move huge herds; once they get a handful moving in the right direction, the others tend to follow.

- ❖ Over time the sheep become especially tuned to his voice because they know that he has what they're looking for.
- ❖ What is it that Jesus has given that His sheep hear and follow? Life – He tells us that He came that we may have *life*, and have it *abundantly*.

That Jesus has come to give us life, *and* give it in *abundance*, is what makes Him the Good Shepherd, and it's *also* what reveals that everyone else is a thief or robber.

- ❖ You see, there are a lot of other “voices” in the world competing for our attention; things like wealth, pleasure, power, honor, family, health, and so on.
- ❖ And these are all *good* things, worthy of giving some attention to, which is exactly how we, like sheep, can all end up going astray, each to our own ways, as the prophet Isaiah says.

May 7, 2017

All these things are good in their own way, but they're not *life-giving*, and *that's* what makes them thieves and robbers.

- ❖ You see, whatever pleasant or gratifying little treat they give has to come at the expense of something else, but our natural instincts and desires often get in the way of recognizing that and making good decisions.
- ❖ Sadly there are countless examples of people who have become so focused on something that it's destroyed everything else in their life.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd because when we let Him lead us those same things can *become* life-giving.

- ❖ Because He infuses them with His own divine life, instead of having one good thing at the expense of another, we have life in abundance.
- ❖ Following Him is like being taken from one pasture to another at just the right time, so that every patch is ready to feed us again when we return and we find life wherever we go.

It's important that we take time every day to listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow where He leads.

- ❖ In reading the gospels and spiritual classics we can listen for his voice, and let ourselves be drawn to Him.
- ❖ By coming to church, we can be fed in the sacraments, and by serving alongside our brothers and sisters we can stay close to the flock.

It's also helpful to pay attention to the other "voices" have gotten or tried to get your attention.

- ❖ They will always be out there, trying to appeal to our instincts and desires with treats that seem more desirable or a path that seems a little easier.
- ❖ What were they offering that attracted you? What were they trying to feed you?

Jesus came that we might have life, and have it in abundance, and even more than that, He does it by giving us His own life.

- ❖ Practice listening always for His voice, calling out in love, so that you won't ever have to settle for anything less.