

# FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

## Good Shepherd Sunday

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The Rev. Robert G. Eaton, Interim Rector  
All Saints' Episcopal Church, San Diego, CA

Jesus said, "I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father." And he also said, "they will listen to my voice."

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.*

This is Good Shepherd Sunday. And to begin I'd like to do a little finish up work of the charge given from last Sunday regarding praying for someone who really needed to be set free from being bound up in some way. Besides a call to redemptory prayer, such divine work is the kind of thing a shepherd does, right? When a sheep is caught in a hole, or in a thicket, or these days in barbed wire, the shepherd comes and sets it free. it fits for today, doesn't it.

*So here's how this will work. You have a sticky note in your bulletin. If you actually took on that prayer for someone this week, then I'd like you, please, to take that sticky note and now write YOUR name on it, not the person for whom you are praying. I've asked the sidesmen to walk down the aisle with a white board, and I'd like you to put that sticky note on it. There are two reasons for this. First, in this confidential way I'd like to gather your intentions into a larger group that will continue to pray for them, AND as you hear of people being set free in answer to prayer, you can share with the larger prayer fellowship that thanksgiving. Second, those who have jumped in and prayed for someone may just have something of a passion for intercession. Perhaps it is a spiritual gift that can be fanned into a further Holy Spirit flame, and directed toward the renewal and revitalization of All Saints' powerful and effective prayer ministry. There're no strings attached here. And anyone else here who would like to be a part of that, even if you didn't already start praying for somebody this week, you put your sticky note on that whiteboard, too.*

*Sidesman, carry the board. ....Thank you. While that is taking place, I'll continue.*

The collect for this day, always the Fourth Sunday of Easter, is very simply doing what's called praying the scripture, which is always a good practice in our prayer lives. In this way the collect does a great job of collecting our focus for our attention:

"Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads"

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This seems clearly a function of prayer, as prayer is defined.

Last December, during Advent, you had two things to assist you in this objective for your prayer life. You had the 30 days of Prayer with reflections that was put together for you as we began this Interim time, in order to get reacquainted with the voice of the good Shepherd. And at the same time, I preached a series of sermons on the subject of prayer, to intentionally be in tandem with the 30 days I hoped you were engaging.

Because it has not been that long ago for that immersion into a discipline of guided daily prayer, and the sermons during Advent, I'm not going to be redundant today in regards to what it means to hear his voice and become reacquainted with the good Shepherd as one of his sheep.

Having said that, though I do want to underscore this, the voice of others is powerful. The voice of God speaking is not only powerful, it is always True. And it is life-giving. And this is true as well, if there is a Good Shepherd speaking Truth, then there are Bad Shepherds seeking power, and speaking Deception and Rebellion and Personal Gain at the expense of others. Obviously, we want to make sure the voices to which we pay attention are good and healthy for us, and above all we want to make sure we know the Good Shepherds voice in our ears and minds and our spirits so we can make those right decisions.

There is a children's song, called O be careful. The song implies the powerful effect of the behavior and words of others upon innocence. As well, the song was written to help instill the importance of avoiding temptation and allowing discernment as the kids grow up. But it is just as important a song for parents and teachers and adults in every venue, including church, to watch over what they say out loud. One of the verses goes like this:

[singing] "O be careful little ears what you hear  
O be careful little ears what you hear  
There's a Father up above  
And He's looking down in love  
So, be careful little ears what you hear"

In her book *Raising Uncommon Kids*, author Sami Cone talks about the power of words and reiterates that:

In fact, one of the most common mistakes we make as parents is assuming our kids don't hear us. I would argue that they do in fact hear most of what we have to say; whether they choose to listen is a completely different story.

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The father of a family tells the story of how his wife one week had invited some people from church to dinner. At the table, the Father turned to their six-year-old daughter and said, "Would you like to say the blessing?" "I wouldn't know what to say," the daughter replied. The wife says, "Just say what you hear Mommy say,". The little girl bowed her head and said: "Dear Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner?"

And lest we forget little ears also means new and immature Christians of any age.

The question is often raised, so how do I know when I am listening to the wrong things, bad things? Great question but the answers can be infinite. The Enemy will throw everything possible to get us off track, and in so doing, get us to stop listening to the voice of Jesus and His Spirit. Although scripture does not shy away from identifying sinful behavior and wrong influences, the answer also from scripture is not simply trying to define every bad thing; the answer is learning more and more, and trusting more and more, in what you already know to be God's Voice, God's word, God's teaching, God's leading. And so be able to discern what is not! You want to get to know the Good Shepherd and hear his voice, so read what he has to say and as the November collect says, mark, learn and inwardly digest it.

That's the first thing. A second thing I felt led to share with you today.

Is that there is the common practice in the Church's life of lifting up the call to Holy Orders as a topic of preaching on Good Shepherd Sunday. This comes from the lessons that sometimes are read having to do with the fact, as I said, there is a good shepherd, and that means there are bad shepherds. And judgement. The Church is therefore always glad to raise up more deacons and priests and bishops who are the kinds of shepherds that we need today, and for the future. The call that goes forth is for more and more individuals who are strong in faith, and faithful in their own relationship with the Good Shepherd to listen to the need the Church has for such individuals to be ordained into leadership. That is Holy Orders. What does that true calling entail, but hearing that call for leadership from the Lord, having that call ring those bells inside you that says pay attention, and hearing from the Body of Christ around you that says, you know, I think the church needs your leadership as a deacon or a priest or a bishop. Then you test it, and the church tests you. You may have heard that inner voice today, or before, and you may have had someone from the congregation ask you that question. So don't set it aside, but pick it up in prayer. The Good Shepherd needs good shepherds.

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And that leads us to the work of the Search Team, as they pray and discern, believing that the Good Shepherd knows them, and they know Him. And that somewhere in all of this, the Good Shepherd knows also those priests – or even that one priest-- who needs to be here at All Saints as your new rector. What difficulties will the Search Team have? Well, they will hear, as I said already, many voices. And they will need to zoom in on the Good Shepherds voice. Our chaplains will help them, but they will need all of you praying for them every day.

This is one of the Responsibilities of the parish for this search. Interceding.

The search team will have their own responsibilities, obviously, as does the vestry. Actually, the vestry has already fulfilled some of their responsibilities. But then they will be asked to make the final decision. So they will also will need to be listening wont they.

And you will be need to be praying.

So not only listening well and being able to discern the difference between good and bad, but also they are in the position of making that very selection of the one who is ordained already, but will become in fact, as the Lutherans believe, the one ordained for us.

This is an incredible ministry of selection, based on listening.

I know we will be applying in prayer the words of Jesus in the Gospel with great hope, that is, and he said, “They will listen to my voice.”

And of course we hope the same for the candidate finalist.

*It is possible you know for the Search Team and then Vestry to select incorrectly. And of course the closer this parish gets to the moment when a selection is made, you will begin to hear, and I already have, the stories of All Saints and other churches past when certain people believe that the wrong choice was made, and they HOPE that the Search and Vestey doesn't get it wrong.*

There was a shepherd tending his sheep at the edge of a country road. A brand new SUV pulls over, and a guy gets out obviously dressed for the city rather than farm land. He says, “What kind of animals are those?” The incredulous shepherder says, “Them's sheep.” So the young city guy says, “I'd like to show one of them to my friends in town. Can I give you \$200 for one?” Still amazed the shepherd says, “Sure. Take your pick.” The young man takes one of the animals and puts it in the back seat of his vehicle. The shepherd then looks at him and says, “Y'know, I've changed my mind. Here's your \$200

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back.” The young man is disappointed and says “Why? What changed your mind?” The shepherd says, Well, because I'd really like to have my dog back.”

*Just so you know, Changing your mind after a rector selection ain't easy.*

What do we hope and pray then? That they, the Search Team and the Vestry, as Jesus said, will listen to my voice, that is they will make the selection based on correct discernment and the leading of the good Shepherd himself through his Spirit.

Well, you see, just hoping doesn't cut it. On your knees prayer is the call to action. I'll have some prayers to post for you to assist as we go on. Because you are all in on this one.

Now, that's the heart of my message today.

I only ask that you see where we started the sermon today is key to how we do that prayer, with all of us as part of our Christian duty in prayer, But also relying upon those who have been called forward to serve, perhaps not in ordination, but those who may have been given a certain anointing or gifting for intercessory prayer.

Again, some of you fall into that category. And you probably already know that you do. Please step up.

With all of our being, let us all continue to hear the voice of the good shepherd, guiding us into our moral responsibilities and ministries, and then bring to him our prayers and intercessions, both in duty and in gifting.

May the Lord empower by his Holy Spirit in great measure the ministry of prayer of All Saints, San Diego. AMEN.

Epilogue, as included in the Sunday bulletin:

*What might be able to be considered as All Saints vision of intercessory prayer that is dependent not upon our strength and wisdom, but upon the strength of God's might, is found as the conclusion of Paul's description and exhortation to put on the full Armor of God. This is in Ephesians 6, where the entire description is found in verses 10 through 20. The verses highlighted for prayer are verse 18-19 (where the last verse is carried into our prayers by asking God's blessing on those who have helped us in becoming Christians, in growing in Faith, and success for those who are evangelizing.)*

“.....<sup>18</sup> praying at all times “in the Spirit”, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,<sup>19</sup> and also

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for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel....” ESV

<sup>18</sup> [And] “Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, <sup>19</sup> and also for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,....” RSV