

Holy Eucharist, Rite II,

Good Shepherd Sunday, 4th Easter, April 25, 2021

The Celebrant and LEM stand, maintaining physical distance. There is no procession.

Opening Rites and the Collect of the Day

Celebrant: Alleluia! Christ is risen.

LEM: *The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

Celebrant: Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

LEM: *Rejoice in the Lord, always; let all that lives, rejoice.*

Celebrant: Let the heavens and the earth ring with God's blessings.

LEM: *For Christ is risen, risen indeed. Alleluia!*

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

LEM: *And also with you.*

Celebrant: Let us pray.

The Celebrant says 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.

Opening Hymn: Alleluia, alleluia, vv.1-2,6

The Hymnal 1982, #191

Alleluia, alleluia!

Hearts and voices heavenward raise:
sing to God a hymn of gladness,
sing to God a hymn of praise.
He, who on the cross a victim,
for the world's salvation bled,
Jesus Christ, the King of glory,
now is risen from the dead.

Now the iron bars are broken,
Christ from death to life is born,
glorious life, and life immortal,
on his resurrection morn.
Christ has triumphed, and we conquer
by his mighty enterprise:
we with him to life eternal
by his resurrection rise.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Glory be to God on high;
Alleluia! to the Savior
who has won the victory;
Alleluia! to the Spirit,
fount of love and sanctity:
Alleluia, alleluia!
to the Triune Majesty.

The First Lesson¹

Acts 4:5-12

⁵The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, ⁶with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?"

¹ The readings are from the Revised Common Lectionary. See: <https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/>.
The table for readings in Year B (Easter) may be found here:
<https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/lections.php?year=B&season=Easter>.
Where two choices are given for readings, use the second one listed.

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, ¹⁰let 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. ¹¹This Jesus is

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

¹²There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

Reader: *The Word of the Lord.*

Celebrant: Thanks be to God.

Psalm of the Day

Psalm 23

¹ The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

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

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

The Second Lesson

1 John 3:16-24

¹⁶We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷How 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?

¹⁸Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. ¹⁹And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him ²⁰whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; ²²and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

²³And 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. ²⁴All 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.

LEM: *The Word of the Lord.*

Celebrant: Thanks be to God.

Gradual Hymn: Be thou my vision

The Hymnal 1982, #488

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
all else be nought to me, save that thou art—
thou my best thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;
thou my great Father; thine own may I be;
thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

High King of heaven, when victory is won,
may I reach heaven's joys, bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

The Gospel

John 10:11-18

Then, all standing, the Deacon or a Priest reads the Gospel, first saying

Celebrant: The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

LEM: *Glory to you, Lord Christ.*

¹¹I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The 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. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

¹⁶I 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. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No 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."

Celebrant: The Gospel of the Lord.

LEM: *Praise to you, Lord Christ.*

The Sermon: The Good Shepherd

Is that true, do you think? That the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, but the hired hand does not? Isn't a shepherd usually a hired hand? I suppose not if the shepherd owns the sheep, which is what's going on in the story the way Jesus tells it. That shepherd, the owner of the sheep – Jesus, God – will fight the wolves to the death to see who gets to...don't go there, preacher. Don't remind the people of the last thing the shepherd will do to each sheep and every, where all that wool comes from, and where all those chops and steaks and roasts will come from. It's best not to dwell on that, since until the very last day of its life a sheep, like every well cared-for and husbanded domestic animal, lives pretty well, all things considered. Dumb as a box of rocks, perhaps, but happy – and don't worry about what those knives are for, little lamb. The good shepherd wouldn't have laid his life down for you if all he meant to do was...

...but of course that's exactly what the good shepherd does, and the very reason why. I find it fascinating to contemplate this, every time this reading comes up. All the effort used to raise and care for sheep is so that the shepherd can use them for something else, which is not all that different from what the wolves have in mind, if you think about it. Except that wolves don't farm, and lions do not raise livestock. Unlike pastoralists, hunters take little care for the lives they take to live on, and animal hunters least of all – which is the way things are in a world we are told God made to be that way and then saw was good that way, red in tooth and claw though that way is, in Tennyson's famously line. The good shepherd cares for the sheep well while it is time to do so, and while the sheep's life lasts. He or she does well with the sheep's wool and the ewes' milk, keeps the flock together and even expands it, if ram and ewe are willing and able. Even though the shepherd knows that no sheep lives forever, s/he cares for and protects them anyway.

The gospel text for this morning is rather more pleased with this situation than I am. The work of shepherds, and its relevance as a teaching tool, are taken for granted as being clear. The ultimate fate of the sheep is of no concern. That may be because there is nothing anyone can do about it, and the salient difference between a good shepherd and a bad one, or a wolf, is enough for the parable to work as a metaphor for human institutions and relations.

Relations, really – that is, relationships. Despite certain institutional over-reading of his words to Peter, that, “On this rock I will build my church” and “If you retain the sins of any, they are retained,” Jesus did not come here to found an institution, or even take one over. He came to show that these things no longer mattered, or were at most things one had to endure, like the weather. People's true calling was to live according to the law of God written in their hearts, in ours hearts – what we like to call these days the ‘Way of Love’ – and to accept that he was removing all the barriers to our following that way.

1st John, as usual, is showing us what that would look like – we lay our lives down for one another, give to those in need when we have more than we need, “love...in truth and action,” and abide in God, receiving from God all for which we ask. It sounds like paradise, and is meant to. It also sounds like the goal, what awaits at the finish line, as though the great questions of life had been solved and the solution made plain and clear, in the prophet’s words, “so that a runner could read it.” It is perfectly consonant with the sweet pastoral that we imagine whenever we contemplate the Good Shepherd: a place where sheep may safely graze, and where no-one thinks too much about what laying one’s life down for someone else actually means, or what the sheep will ultimately have to pay to those who spend every day protecting each sheep’s life – until that sheep’s last day.

So the pastoral metaphor at the heart of this Sunday only goes so far – and laying one’s life down turns out to be the limiter. Nothing lives forever, yet life goes on. This would’ve surprised the early Christians, who thought that Christ was coming back roughly three weeks from next Tuesday to set things right. Yet gradually the descendants of the people who first followed the Way of Love came to understand that they, we, were going to be following that way for the long haul, that very little was new under the sun and the innumerable stars, and that if the world was to be changed, people like them would have to change it. People like them would have to make world, or at least their little corner of it, a place in which good shepherds would no longer actually have to lay down their lives for their sheep, even if they still needed to be willing to. They would have to stick around longer than Jesus was wont to, having as yet nowhere else to go and work to do before they went there. There would still be wolves, hired hands, lamb chops, and disease. Nature would stay red in tooth and claw, even that very Nature from which and in which have emerged all our hopes and dreams.

Yes, though nothing lives forever, life goes on, begging the questions “Why?” and “What for?” “So careful of the type she seems, so careless of the single life” continues Tennyson, lamenting that Nature is thus but without making it clear why (*In Memoriam*, 55). That

poet, in this long poem lamenting the untimely death of his friend, could find little in the natural world, that cycle of life and death and life...and death, that gave him hope. Faint hope, at best, or the ability to “faintly trust the larger hope” after groping in vain for God and finding instead only darkness and chaff in the weak light of a will, or simple habit, to believe – the faint hope that all this life, the universe, and everything somehow mean something good, even and perhaps especially when it doesn’t look that way.

My reflections on the Good Shepherd often lead me to a similar place. The ovine world does not give me much hope, but more the sense that life dully persists without much reason though with an admirable tenacity and patience, seeking a reason why. The cycle may be the answer, or the closest thing we’ll get to an answer. One way or another, each thing that dies enables something else to live, whether it’s a wolf pack, a shepherd’s family, the meat industry, the funeral industry or maybe even the church. The cycle, that is, can become a virtuous spiral: “New occasions teach new duties,” as James Russell Lowell in a poem that became my favorite hymn as a youth: “Time makes ancient good uncouth.” But you can’t tell that to a shepherd, or to sheep.

But you can tell it to people, which is what Jesus’s followers were doing in the early chapters of Acts – the Acts of the Apostles. They might not listen, but you can tell I to them. The people who ran the religion of the 2nd temple were just getting their minds around the fact that the Jesus movement, and the Way of Love it inspired, could not be destroyed by simply crucifying or cutting the head off the leader. They’d tried that twice, and each time the movement had come back stronger, which perplexed them. This time, they had confronted Peter, James, and John and them, questioning in whose name they did their healing. “What does it matter?” you’d want to ask them, if their question had been hostile – or, maybe, “Wouldn’t you like to know?”

The answer they get is, in essence, “We do this in the name of Jesus, whom you killed, but who lives on. His is the new way – the Way of Love. Help us lead it, follow us on it, or get

out of the way.” Peter even gives the Sanhedrin and all the same graceful “out” Jesus gave them on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Peter says, ‘In ignorance you put down John and then tried to kill the Author of Life, but if you wise up now, all will be forgiven.’ He may or may not have believed they’d actually listen – but either way, whether they do or not, Peter, Mary, Thomas, and all the rest of them are moving on. This is a new occasion, that is, and these are our new duties.

Let’s remind ourselves what they are. As 1st John says: to lay our lives down for one another, give to those in need when we have more than we need and even when we do not, “love...in truth and action,” and abide in God, receiving from God all for which we ask. Even if, in the words of Psalm 23, we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me, and my cup runneth over. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies, anointest my head with oil, and leadest me to good, green pastures besides still, safe waters. Goodness and mercy follow me as sheep do the Good Shepherd, for they know his voice, or hers, and I will dwell, as all God’s children will dwell, in the house of the Lord forever. After duty, that is, comes peace.

This psalm has become one well acquainted with grief, recited at almost every funeral I’ve ever been a part of. Yet it was never meant to be a death song or a lament, which may be why it became so popular as one. No, Psalm 23 is a celebration of life and peace, of God’s salvation and protection, and meant to describe not the peace in which we rest in the undiscovered country, the world that is to come, but in this world but as it was at the beginning, and could again be. Psalm 23 is in part an answer to Psalm 22, the one Jesus quotes on the cross when he says, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” and finally realized that the true horror of his death and sacrifice was that he would die without ever knowing the answer to that question.

The reason Psalm 23 has become the lament we sing at the grave is because it can be hard to imagine having peace anywhere else. “Count no one happy until the end is known,” the wise said of old. The saying has also come down to us, “Count no-one happy until that person is dead – but merely lucky.” Try as they might, the Christians could not erase human mortality or human fragility, and the reality that life can be beautiful and terrible at once, with joys here and horrors there. Nothing lasts, not the night nor the day, but life goes on anyway.

And God saw that it was good, we are told – just as the shepherd is good, never mind the final end of the sheep or the wolves. Until that last day, count none happy – which is all the more reason to love one another as he loved us, lay down our lives for one another as he laid his life down so that we could, so that we would have the time, space, and freedom to love like he did, no matter what. *Amen.*

There is no passing of plates or reception of gifts.

The Deacon or Priest prepares the altar and sanctuary for the Eucharist.

The People make ready their gifts of bread and wine. The LEM continues

The Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Prayers of the People

The LEM prays. In the silence after each bidding, the People offer their prayers without speaking.

I ask your prayers for all God's people; for our bishops, our clergy, and this gathering,
and for all ministers and people. Pray for the Church.

Silence

I ask your prayers for peace; for goodwill among nations; and for the well-being of all.
Pray for justice and peace.

Silence

I ask your prayers for the poor, the sick, the hungry, the oppressed, and those in prison.
Pray for those in any need or trouble.

Silence

I ask your prayers for all who seek God, or a deeper knowledge of God.
Pray that they may seek, and pray that they might find.

Silence

I ask your prayers for the departed [*especially N.N.*]. Pray for those who have died.

Silence

I ask your prayers for those on the prayer list of this parish, and those whose needs are known to you alone.

Silence

The Celebrant adds a concluding collect.

The Peace

The People stand.

Celebrant: The peace of the Lord be always with you,

LEM: *And also with you.*

The Ministers and People greet one another in silence while keeping physical distance.

The Holy Eucharist: The Great Thanksgiving

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

LEM: *And also with you.*

Celebrant: Lift up your hearts.

LEM: *We lift them to the Lord.*

Celebrant: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

LEM: *It is right to give God thanks and praise.*

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, holy Lord, giver of life and light. You fill us with your blessings and feed us with your constant love; you have redeemed us in Christ Jesus, renewed us in your Spirit, and brought us into everlasting life.

Therefore we praise you, joining with Angels and Archangels and with all the host of heaven, who forever sing this hymn, to the glory of your Name,

The LEM says or sings:

*Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.*

Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

The Celebrant continues

Blessed are you, gracious God, maker of all things, judge of all who live. You made us in your image and to live in your infinite love. You gave the world into our care and bade us be faithful stewards of its bounty. But we honored not your gifts, misused your creation, abused one another, and rejected your love.

Yet you never ceased to care for us. You called us into your promise, delivered us from bondage, sustained us in the wild, and sent prophets to bid us repent and return.

Then, in the fullness of time, you sent your eternal Word, made human in Christ Jesus, to live as one of us, and to reveal your glory. Giving himself up to death on the cross, he triumphed over evil and opened for us the way of everlasting life.

On the night before he died, as he sat at table with his friends, Our Lord Jesus Christ took bread. Giving thanks to you, he broke it, and shared it with them, saying:

“Take, eat: This is my Body which is given for you. Do this in memory of me.”

As supper was ending, Jesus took the cup, gave thanks, and shared it with them, saying:

“Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, poured out for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in memory of me.”

Therefore, we proclaim the mystery of faith:

The LEM says

Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

The Celebrant continues

In that mystery we offer to you this bread and this wine, fruit of the vine and the work of human hands. May they become for us the Body and Blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. May we who share them be filled with that Holy Spirit to live as Christ's Body in the world. May we come to the everlasting heritage of your children, and with the apostles and martyrs and all your saints, enter into the joys of your salvation.

Through Christ and with Christ and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, to you be honor, glory, and praise, now and forever. *AMEN.*

Now, as Christ taught us, we are bold to say,

The LEM prays

*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.*

The Breaking of the Bread

The Celebrant breaks the consecrated Bread, and then keeps a period of silence. The Celebrant continues

Celebrant: Alleluia! Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;

LEM: *Therefore, let us keep the feast. Alleluia!*

Celebrant: The Gifts of God for the People of God.

The People consume their gifts. After Communion, the Celebrant says

Let us pray. *The Celebrant prays*

Eternal God, holy Lord, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart, through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Blessing and Dismissal

The Celebrant says

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord be with you, this day and always, and give you peace.

The LEM says

Let us go forth, in peace, to love and serve the Lord. Alleluia, Alleluia!

Withdrawal Hymn: The King of love, vv.1,2,6

The Hymnal 1982, #646

The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his,
and he is mine for ever.

Where streams of living water flow,
my ransomed soul he leadeth,
and where the verdant pastures grow,
with food celestial feedeth.

And so through all the length of days
thy goodness faileth never:
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house for ever.

The Celebrant, the LEM, and the People depart, maintaining physical distance.

St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Fairland, MD

12621 Old Columbia Pike

Silver Spring, MD 20904

office@stmarks-silverspring.org * 301-622-5860 ext. 1002

The Rev. Dr. Christopher Wilkins, Priest-in-Charge

rector@stmarks-silverspring.org * 301-622-5860 ext. 1001

Linda Lee, Parish Administrator

administrator@stmarks-silverspring.org * 301-622-5860 ext. 1003

Beresford Coker, Musical Director

Joyce Walker, Administrative Assistant

Lee Mericle, Senior Warden

Rosanne Tingley, Junior Warden

For information about St. Mark's, please visit our website:

www.stmarksfairland.org

www.stmarks-silverspring.org

We hope that today's service has been a blessing to you.

We are here to serve you, and hope to see you again.

Please feel free to call us, email us, or visit us online.