



FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Year A

Act 2:14a, 36-41
Palm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6
1 Peter 2:20b-25
John 10:1-10

Gathering

(An unlit candle, a Bible open to this week's gospel and an uneven pile of rocks rest on a table covered with a colorful cloth.)

This week we continue our Easter journey reflecting on the open *gate* that invites us into God's grace, the authentic voice that calls us to the path of salvation. We listen for the shepherd's voice speaking to each of us in this Easter season. Last week we travelled on the way to Emmaus with Jesus and the two disciples. Where did you discover the presence of Jesus this past week?

Prayer

(The candle is lit. Members rest silently in the presence of God. After a time of quiet, prayer continues as follows.)

Leader: Let us pray.

All: Loving Shepherd, you know our names; you care for us.
When we face darkness and death walk beside us.
When we hunger for your love, fill us with a sense of your presence.
When we are fearful, feed us at your table.
May we dwell in the house of goodness and mercy all the days of our lives.
Amen.

Mary Petrina Boyd. "Worship Elements: April 26, 2015." Ministry Matters. ministrymatters.com/all/entry/5917/worship-elements-april-26-2015

HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.

When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. Pausing between them, the leader then poses these two questions: "What draws you to this gospel?" "Where do you resist this gospel?" The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)

Reflection

Sometimes it seems that life is full of obstacles, roadblocks, glass ceilings, closed doors. We search for the key; the word or action that will clear the path to all that we desire, the one thing that we believe will make us happy. We might even pray for it. But *the* path to the one, true thing that will bring us the peace that we seek is always clear, and the gate is always open.

Jesus is both shepherd and gate in this gospel. He is the one who watches over us as the special ones entrusted to his care. His is the voice we follow, the only gate through which we can find a life that makes sense. The life

within his sheepfold is not simply one of survival and endurance, but life in abundance. And even better, the gate to this life springs open freely for any who choose to pass through it. His voice both welcomes us into the safety of the fold and leads us out to find food, drink and the fullness of life.

It sounds so simple: just walk on through and leave your cares in the shepherd's hands.

But leaders and followers both have responsibilities in this relationship. Jesus, the true shepherd, is a leader we can trust, a voice that we can recognize and follow without fear or anxiety. His is authentic leadership – cherishing, guarding and encouraging us through the complexities of life – and willingly sacrificing himself for our welfare. For our part, following an authentic leader means being willing to travel faithfully through both the dark valleys and the refreshing streams of life, sometimes relinquishing our plans and desires, our self-determination, to stay on this path of eternal safety and sustenance.

For those who spend their energy banging on the walls of fear and disappointment, the open door is a missed opportunity. For those who accept the invitation of Jesus to come and go freely in his care, their needs will be fulfilled in ways they cannot begin to imagine.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ Who are the true shepherds, the authentic leaders who inspire you in our world today? What is it about them that marks them out as authentic to you?
- ◆ Recall a time when passing through the *open door* of Jesus' invitation led you to a place of peace and fulfillment.
- ◆ In what ways has your faith provided strength, sustenance and safety during difficult times in your life?
- ◆ How is the *voice* of the shepherd calling to you these days?

HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: "What do you want to hold on to for

yourself from this session?” “How are you/we being called to live in response to God’s word?” After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action Suggestions

- ◆ Choose a place where you won’t be distracted, and spend 10 minutes each day this week in silence, listening for the voice of Jesus. Don’t be frustrated if *nothing happens* right away – be patient and allow Jesus to speak to your heart.
- ◆ Practice discernment when listening to media reports and reading online commentaries, and try to distinguish authentic *voices* from self-serving ones. Pray for leaders in our communities, our country and our world, that they will put the needs of others first and act with the wisdom and compassion of Jesus, the model of authentic leadership.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel or a portion of it, either of the other readings as appropriate or the responsorial psalm are proclaimed. The idea is to select a text that lends itself to inviting members to the time of silent prayer that follows. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: “What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?” “What do you say to him in response?” The community pauses for a full five minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment.

Following this sharing, members join in singing, “Shepherd Me, O God.” The song is available on the Internet. When the song is complete, prayer continues as follows.)

Leader: Holy and Gracious God, you call us by name, and beckon us to follow you.
May we do so through your grace.
Like a shepherd tending the flock, you tend to our needs.
Be present with those who struggle,

suffer, are in pain or sorrow.

Guide those who are lost, or filled with worry and fear.

In your Name we pray, hear our prayer.

All: God of peace, watch over those who lead us.

Fill our leaders with wisdom, patience, insight, and

Leadership.

Help them to lead with kindness and strength.

In your Name we pray, hear our prayer.

All: God of love, fill our hearts with the knowledge of You.

May we be agents of your compassion, offering kindness

Leadership to those we meet this day.

In your Name we pray, hear our prayer.

All: God of all blessings, we thank you for all the gifts of life.

For your Son, our Savior, our great Good Shepherd,

Leadership the one who stands at the gate of all

life's challenges and joys,

calling out to us in love and naming us, Beloved.

In your Name we pray, hear our prayer.

All:

Sunday Prayer: Easter 4A. WordsMatter.

Episcopal. 5/15/2011. *expansivelanguage*.

blogspot.com/2011/05/sunday-prayer-easter-4a.html

(Members join hands to pray the Lord's Prayer. The session concludes with the exchange of a sign of peace.)