

SERMON FOR LAYREADERS

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER:

“GOOD SHEPHERD” SUNDAY

Brian McKee¹

First Lesson:²

Here beginneth the fortieth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever. O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson:⁴

Here beginneth the tenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.⁵

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.”⁶

Homily:

Let us pray:

Almighty and all-powerful God, who sent Thine only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into the world, to lay down His life for us, and to be the Good Shepherd of us all: help us to be shepherds to those who are lost that we encounter in our lives. Give us the courage and boldness to share the story of what Thine only Son, Jesus Christ, has done to save the world from our sins, and to give us the gift of eternal life. Through Jesus Christ our loving, kind and compassionate Good Shepherd. *Amen.*

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¹ Brian McKee, OSL, is Prior of the Southeastern Ohio Chapter of the Order of St. Luke (UMC) and Organist, Cantor, and Lay Reader in a mission of the Anglican Catholic Church.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxx (PECUSA 1928/1943).

³ Isaiah 40:1-11 (KJV).

⁴ *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxx (PECUSA 1928/1943).

⁵ John 10:1-10 (KJV).

⁶ John 10:4 (KJV).

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday, the day we remember that Jesus Christ described Himself as our Good Shepherd.

The occupation of being a shepherd was well known in the time of Jesus Christ, and His earthly ministry. It was not a prestigious job, to be sure. It was a hard and dangerous life.

Shepherds had to protect the sheep from dangerous predators, even to the point of laying down their lives to protect the sheep. Jesus's words obviously foreshadow the reality that, eventually, He would lay down His own life for the human "sheep" in the world.

It seems very appropriate that, on that night long ago in Bethlehem, the very first people the angels told that Jesus Christ, the very Son of Almighty God, had been born, were the shepherds, who were "keeping watch over their flocks by night."

Further, shepherds had to move the sheep from place to place to provide them with pasturage to eat and water, from an oasis, a stream, or pond, to drink. Once again, a good comparison to Jesus Christ, who instituted the Holy Eucharist, to provide our spiritual food and drink, through the Holy Mystery of a Sacrament, in which we feed on the Precious Body and the Precious Blood of Christ our Good Shepherd.

Another important duty of shepherds was to keep the sheep gathered into a herd, and try to stop them from being separated from the herd, and becoming lost. If a sheep were lost, the shepherd would search for the lost sheep until the sheep was found, and return it safely to the herd. This is an excellent comparison to Jesus Christ, who willingly gave His life as loving sacrifice, once and for all, to save all of the lost human "sheep" of the world.

Shepherds were a very necessary occupation in ancient times. However, in more recent times, people began to think shepherds were unnecessary. People invented fences to keep the sheep in an enclosed pasture with pasture and water. With the fences they thought that they would no longer need shepherds to keep the sheep from getting lost. Fences were thought to be a way of replacing shepherds.

But just how effective are fences, as compared to a kind, compassionate shepherd?

One day while driving through the English countryside, I saw just how ineffective fences can be, compared to a loving shepherd. The road ran between two ancient stone fences, built to replace shepherds in the English countryside, just barely wide enough for the car to pass through. As I rounded a corner, thankfully, driving very slowly, I had to slam on my brakes! Right in front of me in the road, with no room to swerve and miss them, were some sheep which had managed to jump over, or somehow get out of, their fenced pasture.

Luckily, at a slow speed, I could stop just in time, and not harm some lovely sheep with their adorable little lambs. It seems a fence just doesn't do the job! It certainly doesn't protect the sheep like a shepherd would.

Sadly, countless throngs of people in our world today think that they no longer need our beloved Good Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ. They think that fences of humanism, a false sense of human goodness, and other "fences" of human design can make the world a good place, and that there just isn't a need for Christ in our world, or in their own lives.

We only have to look at the world to see how wrong these misguided people, and a misguided society, truly can be. Crime, terrorism, starvation, abuse and molestation,

murders, greed and theft, and all other symptoms of people choosing not to accept our Good Shepherd into their hearts, and lives, make it obvious why human-designed fences cannot replace Jesus Christ in our world.

All around us are "lost sheep". Many are people that we live next door to, see at work everyday, and people we just pass by each day. They are truly lost. They are hurting, sometimes physically, sometimes emotionally, and usually hurting spiritually. Jesus Christ calls us all to be shepherds. Jesus Christ our Good Shepherd calls us all to find all the "lost sheep" that we can and return them to Christ's sheepfold - the church.

We can be shepherds by extending friendship and kindness. We can be shepherds by helping, and visiting, the sick, the injured, and the lonely. We can especially be a shepherd to them by telling them in simple, everyday words how Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd has impacted our own lives. We can tell them how Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd saved us from being lost, and how He has given us the hope of life eternal.

We need not be a gifted speaker, or a clergyman. In fact, such sharing of our life in Christ is much more effective if it is in our own simple words, nothing fancy, and especially nothing complicated. We need to share the love of the Good Shepherd with the world by simple words, and, especially, by our actions of kindness and compassion.

Remember these words of Jesus, and share these words with everyone you know who needs to accept Jesus our Good Shepherd into his or her life: "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep."

Share with all the lost sheep you encounter how Jesus Christ died on the Cross, in pain and agony, laying down His life for you and for me.