

Fourth Sunday of Easter; May 8, 2022  
+ John 10:22-30 +  
“Our Good Shepherd Guides and Guards”

**Then the Festival of Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple area in Solomon’s Colonnade.**

**So the Jews gathered around Jesus, asking, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”**

**Jesus answered them, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I am doing in my Father’s name testify about me. But you do not believe, because you are not my sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”**

Every year on this Fourth Sunday in Easter we focus on Jesus our Good Shepherd. Jesus is our guiding and guarding Good Shepherd. We see this in all our lessons today, and see it in our lives as well. Our Good Shepherd will guide and guard us all the way through this life and home to heaven, and there he will guide and guard us forever.

Listen to what Jesus proclaims: **“My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.”** My dear fellow sheep, hear your Shepherd’s voice. Follow him. Christ has called us out of the darkness and depravity of this world. He has called us from death to life by dying the death we deserved for our sins. We were lost and trapped in the thicket of sin. But our Shepherd came and rescued us. He pried open Satan’s jaws and saved us from his power. He put us on his shoulders and carried us, as he carried the cross on which he died to make us his own.

Thanks be to God! We would have no shepherd at all if not for what Jesus has done for us! We would be lost and devoured. But Jesus laid down his life for the sheep, and took it up again on Easter. And with that, Jesus called us from death to life.

He has called us by name in baptism. There he has placed the name of the Triune God on us to mark as those sheep belonging to God’s flock. We have Jesus as our Shepherd. And that makes all the difference. Because now, Jesus is guiding us. He guides us whenever he speaks to us: **“My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.”** This is where you hear his voice. You hear Jesus’ voice when his undershepherd declares: **“I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”** You hear his voice when he says, **“Take; eat; Take and drink. This is my body. This is my blood.”** This is where Jesus guides you into the green pastures of his pardon and peace, for as long as you walk through this sinful world.

Here Jesus also guides you in how to walk as his own sheep. Because there are those in this world who do not belong to Jesus, as he makes clear in the Gospel. And there is our enemy who wants us back in his jaws. But we do not walk like the rest in the world. And we do not go near the one who wants to devour us, or listen to his luring lies. We walk in lock step with our Shepherd’s will, because we belong to him. Here we also listen to his voice so that we follow him in all we think, say and do.

So Jesus is the Good Shepherd who guides us by rescuing us and teaching us how to follow him. But Jesus does more: he also guards us.

The shepherd's staff has two uses. One end is crook used to tug wandering sheep back to the shepherd's side, so they will not be lost. But the other end is a weapon, often a club or a spear tip used to clobber or impale predators who want to attack the sheep. This is what Jesus does for us, his sheep. He protects us from all enemies and dangers we face.

As Jesus' sheep listen to his voice, he is not only guiding them in the truth but also guarding them from error. When you listen to the Shepherd's voice, you will recognize Satan's half-truths temptations for what they are: satanic and lethal. And you will not fall for them. You will also recognize those voices that claim to speak for God but instead speak their own ideas and opinions, which do not align with the voice of your Shepherd.

When you listen to the Shepherd's voice, he is also guarding you from the dangerous ideas of your world: that what you believe in your heart isn't nearly as important as what you do with your hands, and that God will determine your fate based on the kind of life you live. This is what our world – including faiths that do not follow Jesus – tell us. When you listen to Jesus' voice, you will know the truth: what you believe about Jesus in your heart is how God will determine your eternal fate. And what you believe about Jesus in your heart is what will lead your hands to do what God desires.

He is guarding you from lies. He is also guarding you from fear. He is the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for you to make your part of his flock. But he also picked his life up again. As his sheep, you know will follow him also out of the grave. And so you will not live in fear of death, or, for that matter, any other danger in this world. Because you know Jesus is with you through it all, and that whatever you go through – even death – the heaven he earned for you waits at the end of it.

Jesus is the guiding and guarding Shepherd, determined to get us safely home. And from what St. John sees in his Revelation, we know what that will look like: **These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Because of this they are in front of the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple. He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. They will never be hungry or thirsty again. The sun will never beat upon them, nor will any scorching heat, for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.**

Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, was sacrificed for our sins. By trusting in him, we wash our robes in his blood and receive the complete righteousness we need to enter heaven.

But the Lamb also rose victorious and ascended back to heaven's throne. So when we arrive before his throne, that living Lamb of God will be our Shepherd in heaven, too. All enemies and danger will be gone, and yet it appears he will still guard us anyway. Why would he spread his tent over us and protect us from scorching heat and hunger and thirst and sadness, when heaven is already free of all these things? Because he's a Shepherd, and that's just what shepherds do. They guard. So he will continue to guard us, even when there's no longer anything to guard us from!

He will also still lead and guide us. He will guide us as we serve him day and night in his temple. Never think for a second that heaven is going to be boring, or somehow less interesting than the life you have in

this world. There will be work for us to, but work that is eternally fascinating, completely rewarding, and never frustrating or exhausting. Perfect work. And Jesus will guide us in it.

Not only will our Good Shepherd guide us in that heavenly service, he will also lead us to heavenly satisfaction, to **springs of living water**. We can understand just a little what this satisfaction of heaven will be like, because we know the feeling of cool water touching our thirsty lips on a hot day. But in this world we get thirsty again. And even as we drink this world's water we know it is supporting bodies that are infected by sin and destined to fail.

But not when we drink from the springs of living water in heaven. This water is total satisfaction and endless life for those who have reached the holiness of heaven.

He will guide us there in our work. He will guide to springs of living water. And he will guide us to life and joy that will always be ahead of us. No more thirst, no more hunger, no more danger. No more tears, either. Only life and joy, the same number of days of it ahead after even countless days have passed.

Jesus, our guiding and guarding shepherd, is leading us there now. Until you get there, keep listening to his voice. That is how he will guide you and guard you throughout your life here, until he guides and guards you there. Amen.