

Homily Easter 4C  
May 8, 2022  
S. Stephen's, Providence

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

+ In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Each year on this Fourth Sunday of Easter,  
we hear some portion of the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel,  
in which Jesus teaches about the Good Shepherd, and of course,  
in which we learn that Jesus is himself the Good Shepherd.

Today, in a liturgy full of images of shepherds and sheep,  
we are reminded in the psalm that we are God's people,  
and the sheep of his pasture;

and in the Revelation to St. John,

we are given that celestial vision of the Lamb upon the Throne,  
the Lamb who is paradoxically also he Good Shepherd.

But then again, our faith is founded upon one paradox after another,  
is it not?

Life out of Death,

Light from Darkness,

a God who reigns in utmost strength in his moment of weakness,

a God who teaches that order to ascend we must descend,

and a God who invites us to descend into the waters of baptism,

by which we share in Christ's death,

only to rise again out of those waters and share in his Resurrection.

The Lamb who is also the Good Shepherd

shows us a God who will go in search of us into even the darkest valley

in order to reach out and save us,

and bring us back into the safety of those green and pleasant pastures

of which the psalmist sings.

In John's Gospel,

Jesus as Good Shepherd is one of the great "I AM" statements:

I am the Resurrection and the Life,

I am the Light of the World,

I am the Way the Truth and the Life,

I am the Bread of Life,

I am the True Vine,

I am the Door for the Sheep,

I am the Good Shepherd.

We should understand all those statements as connected.

The Good Shepherd is imbued with all those other attributes,

which together still only give us a small foretaste

of the fullness of God, who is above all else Love.

Though we do not hear these words in today's Gospel reading,

it is worth remembering that what makes the Good Shepherd good

is his willingness to risk his life,

even lay down his life

for the sheep.

This is a Shepherd who calls the sheep his friends,

and so he thinks nothing of putting himself between them and harm's way

when danger arises.

This is the true and model Shepherd,

the pattern for faithful leadership defined by self-sacrifice and protection.

This is the Shepherd in whom we place our trust –

our hopes, our fears, our joys –

we give to him because we trust in his goodness,  
and that he will come in search of us when we have gone astray.

We place our trust in him

because at some point we have sensed with every fiber of our being

that he is indeed the true Shepherd – the true and living God –

who calls us each by name,

and knew us even when we were within our mother’s womb.

This is a Shepherd who knows us intimately,

and this seems to go to the fundamental nature

of the relationship between sheep and shepherd:

that of being known.

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me,”

Jesus says in our Gospel reading.

These words capture many of the aspects of Holy Baptism,

a sacrament which we will undertake in just a few moments.

In Baptism,

we proclaim a God who is the Good Shepherd,

one who came down to earth to rescue his sheep,

and bring them once and for all into the safety of pasture.

Those who recognize the truth of his message,

the truth of his voice,

respond to his call:

they hear his voice, and so they follow him.

To be Baptized is to profess a willingness to follow that model Shepherd.

It is a readiness to follow him wherever he may lead.

We follow a Shepherd who knows us,

and we, in kind, are given the privilege of knowing him.

At some point in your life,

perhaps you've heard his voice clearly,

calling you.

Perhaps at this moment you feel more like the lost sheep,

waiting to be found and brought back upon his shoulders.

Frankly,

both of those things can be true at once.

Because whether you've been following him for 8 decades or 8 weeks,

the Christian life is one in which we can both be saved and,

at times, still feel lost along the way.

Our Baptism, though washing away our sins,  
does not wash away the very real living of life,  
with all its ups and downs.

As you'll hear in just a moment,  
it presupposes that we will fall into sin along the way,  
but that Good Shepherd gives us the grace  
to repent and return to him,  
to enter once more through that Door,  
and into the safety of that pasture.

As I stand here this morning,  
I am reminded of Good Shepherd Sunday last year:  
I celebrated mass here,  
and stood in this very pulpit,  
preaching about Jesus the Good Shepherd.

Several hours later,  
I found myself laying on the ground,  
without my phone and away from any people nearby,

with a severely broken leg.

I was in a place in which I needed the rescuing of the Good Shepherd.

Those hours were some of the most pain and fear-filled in my life,

at least to date:

but I felt the loving protection of the Good Shepherd

and his blessed Mother

watching over me the whole time.

As I reflected on the nature of the baptized life,

and the ways in which we fall into sin and turn again to God,

it occurred to me that my own experience

on Good Shepherd Sunday last year

is an apt metaphor for the Christian life,

a life in God which we are about to formally welcome June Randall into:

It is a life in which we know we are loved and cherished by God,

and that we are beloved and dear in his sight.

We are sheep who strive to enter through the narrow gate.

And yet the things of life befall us.

Quite simply, we fall down and we get hurt.

We get scraped and bruised along the way.

We make mistakes, and we betray our friends and even ourselves.

The Good Shepherd already knows all that,

and he loves us in spite of that – perhaps even because of that.

He looks at us with nothing but compassion,

ready at all times to plunge himself into the depths of our own darkness,

and bring us out again.

We emerge carried on his shoulders,

carried by that Good Shepherd back to those places of goodness and light.

Juniper Lucia Randall,

you are already a beloved child of God, made in his image.

You are indeed precious in his sight,

and the love that your parents, Grant and Alissa, have for you,

is surpassed only by the love of God for you.

You will come to know it later,

but the journey begun here today will mark the rest of your life.

As you grow in love and wisdom and grace,

the love of God will sustain you over and over again.



You will fall into sin – you will fall down and get bruised,  
scraped, maybe even broken.

But God who is the Good Shepherd is looking over you constantly,  
ready to reach out to you and take you by the hand,  
and bring you to safety once more,  
healing your every injury.

This is what your parents are doing for you today.

You belong to a close-knit family with your mother, father, and brother:  
but today you formally join an even larger family,  
one joined not by DNA and physical blood,  
but by their redemption in the blood of the Lamb.

June, today you will formally be welcomed into the family of God,  
a people sealed and marked as Christ's own for ever.

When we got lost, we listen for his voice, because he knows us,  
and calls us each by name.

June, it is an odd and wondrous calling,  
but it is better than anything else we ever know.

As St. John writes in his vision, describing the people of God,

“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

“For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Welcome into the family, June.

We are so glad to share with you in Christ’s redemption.

Let us now prepare to welcome this beautiful child into the family of God,  
the family of sheep who follow this Good Shepherd,  
those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

And to that Lamb upon the throne be blessing and glory  
and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might,  
for ever and ever! Amen.