

Easter 4 Year B  
The Rev. Janet MacNally  
April 25, 2015

Acts 4:5-12  
1 John 3:16-24  
John 10:11-18

There are many things in the liturgical life of the church on which one can always rely. Christmas comes on December 25<sup>th</sup>, Pentecost seems to signal the end of the program year and the fourth Sunday of Easter is always Good Shepherd Sunday. This is the Sunday where there are a multitude of sheep and shepherd references from hymns to prayers to stained glass windows and everything in between. Jesus as the Good Shepherd, kind and caring and loving is one of our most beloved images and it finds its roots in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel. And so it is that over the course of the three year lectionary cycle we hear almost the entirety of the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter.

As this is Year B we find ourselves today in the middle of the chapter with Jesus referring to Himself as the good shepherd, one who lay down his life for the sheep and while there is much speculation over just who is represented by the hired hand who runs away at the first sign of danger, the important thing to realize is that Jesus is the good shepherd who knows us, to whom we belong and who was willing to lay down His life for us. The Greek word used to describe this shepherd is the word *kalos* which when translated into English as good we then relate to being the opposite of bad, as in the hired hand who runs away is bad. But a more accurate translation would be good in the sense of being a model shepherd, a shepherd that provides an example for us to follow. In addition, the disciples heard and so do we by extension that the flock we are in is not the only flock, that there are other flocks, other sheep who also recognize Jesus voice, who also belong to Him. And so it is at the end of this portion of the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter that the model shepherd has laid down His life for all that He has returned to the Father who has in turn sent the Spirit to empower us, those who hear and recognize His voice to continue the work of shepherding God's people. The question of how we are to go about that work is in fact the center of the New Testament reading this morning for 1<sup>st</sup> John. Generally thought to be a commentary on the Gospel of John for the next generation this epistle centers on two main themes; first we should believe in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and secondly that we should love one another as he has loved us. And so our reading centers on our following the example of the good or model shepherd and asks most pointedly "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and refuses to help?" and stresses that love is not shown in word or speech but rather in action.

Our Presiding Bishop Katharine took part in an initiative this past month that called Episcopalians into 30 days of action concerning Mark Five of the Five Marks of Mission. The Five Marks of Mission were developed by the Anglican Consultative Council between 1984 and 1990, have won wide acceptance among Anglicans, and have given parishes and dioceses around the world a practical and memorable "checklist" for mission activities. The fifth mark is the following: To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. During the time between March 25<sup>th</sup> and Earth Day our Presiding Bishop called us to "become effective shepherds and pasture tenders for the whole creation." She went on to comment that "we are meant to love God and what God has created and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus insists that those who will enjoy abundant life are those who care for all neighbors, especially the 'least of these' – the hungry and thirsty, the imprisoned and sick – and that must include all the species that God has nurtured on this planet." If we are to follow the model shepherd we must be good and faithful stewards of the gift of "this fragile earth our island home."

We witness the effects of climate change on a daily basis. Sometimes it seems to be a matter of curiosity as we observed massive snow falls in Boston and the surrounding area. Other times we witness devastating tornadoes and hurricanes that level homes, businesses and lives. Today we pray for our sisters and brothers a world away who are suffering following a powerful 7.8 magnitude earthquake in Nepal. Tremors were felt across the region, with further loss of life in India, Bangladesh, Tibet and on Mount Everest. The death toll has reached over one thousand and continues to rise. The one thing that all of these natural disasters have in common is that it is the least among us, those who the Good Shepherd has commanded us to care for those that have the least that lose the most. If we as a faith community are to live into the words of first John and act to help our sisters and brothers in need, if we are to love our neighbors as ourselves we have no choice but to safeguard and care for creation.

There are times when problems seem so large that it becomes impossible for us to see any possibility of a solution. Those are the times we need to remember the Chinese proverb that tells us the longest of journeys begins with the smallest of steps. Here at St. Christopher's we are doing things that may seem small or even commonplace. For example, we recycle, with great enthusiasm around here! We are deep into planning for this year's Giving Garden that will not only provide fresh vegetables for Keystone Community Food Shelf, but also contain plants that will nurture other members of God's

creation. And we are about to embark on a somewhat larger and less commonplace venture as we get ready to have solar panels installed on our roof. All of these activities however small or large help us as a faith community live into that fifth mark of mission.

I have always said that my ultimate goal was for every member of St. Christopher's from the smallest to the largest, from the newest to the oldest to be engaged in some form of mission. We can all, everyone of us, live into Mark Number Five, we can all of us make decisions on a daily basis that can and will have an impact on the earth and all creation. We can, all of us, follow the model of the Good Shepherd and assure that all our sisters and brothers have abundant life by doing what our Presiding Bishop urges us and become effective shepherds and pasture tenders for the whole of creation.