

## Where the Good Shepherd Leads

We live in anxious times. Perhaps humanity always has. But the current times feel more anxiety-filled than perhaps they have for the last few decades.

The main source of that anxiety may be different for each of us. It might be the current political regime in the US, the many and varied impacts of the war between Iran and the US, the effect of social media and AI, the impact of climate change, our relationships with those around us, or the health of ourselves and those close to us.

During times of anxiety, when life feels vulnerable, it is not uncommon for communities to fracture, bodies to remain vulnerable, creation itself to be strained, and for fear to settle deep within ordinary life.

The readings today bear witness to another possibility: that life can still be held carefully enough to remain possible.

We are invited to entrust our lives to God's care and to answer the call to follow the good shepherd.

In the reading from Acts we join the fledgling community not long after the Holy Spirit has come upon the disciples, divided tongues, as of fire, appeared to rest on them.

Now, the community is organizing itself so that the needs of those in the community do not remain hidden and no one is left to carry life alone. We hear how they are learning as a community, as the growing church to share meals, share resources and share praise.

Luke describes a community learning, day by day, how not to let the fear of insufficiency govern them completely.

This is not presented as heroic. It is through simple, repeated acts. Meals again. Prayers again. Gathering again. The miracle may simply be that they keep choosing to remain available to one another.

Fear of insufficiency adds to our anxiety. Many people now live with the quiet pressure of not knowing whether there will be enough: enough money, enough energy, enough time, enough future.

Sometimes it is the simple things, repeated that make a difference. Showing up, listening, eating, praying, sharing. Making life liveable.

In Psalm 23 recognizes what is needed to live. It is an acknowledgment of the reality of life – that there are fertile places and dark valleys, that there is nourishment and threat. God is paying attention to what allows a creature to keep living. Grass that can sustain. Water that can be safely reached. Paths that do not lead to ruin. Rest that actually restores.

What defines God's care is not that God will remove difficulties and obstacles, but that God refuse to abandon the vulnerable. The shepherd attends to the sheep, leading them to still waters and green pastures, pathways lead to safe places.

The psalmist is confident that someone is paying attention to what keeps life from collapsing; there is no denial of the realities of life. God notices depletion before it becomes

collapse. Care appears as guidance, provision, shelter, and presence over time. Making life liveable.

In John's gospel Jesus is telling a parable of the good shepherd to a group of Pharisees after they were investigating him for healing a blind man on the Sabbath. The Pharisees and disciples would have been quite familiar with the precariousness of life for both the shepherds and the sheep out in the pastures. Predators existed. Thieves existed. Sheep scatter easily. Survival depends on recognition.

The sheep know the shepherd's voice. That detail carries more weight than it first appears. Life here depends on learning which voices lead towards life, and which lead towards diminishment. Discernment is a survival skill.

Abundant life is not about more and more, it is not about limitless expansion, but abundant life is about recognisable belonging: about being called, gathered, and guarded against dispersal. Making life liveable.

God's response to the harshness of the world seems to take the form of a way of living that keeps making room for life to continue. Perhaps that is what the shepherd image finally gives us. Not an escape from the earth, but a way of remaining upon it. Not a demand to be unafraid, but an invitation to handle life gently because it is known to be breakable. That gentleness begins with us.

The good shepherd is leading the sheep to still waters and green pastures. The good shepherd calls us by name. The good shepherd through the Holy Spirit calls us into community.

These readings are remarkably clear about how exposed life remains. Communities remain fragile. Bodies remain vulnerable. The future remains uncertain. The earth itself is subject to strain.

And yet we are called to another possibility. People continue to share what they have. Care continues to be given. Voices continue to call scattered lives back towards belonging.

Life can still be held carefully enough to remain possible.

We are invited to entrust our lives to God's care and to answer the call to follow the good shepherd.

We can start right here, right now to make life liveable in our community, in our parish. It does not need to be big. As Luke said in Acts, it is the little act of caring done regularly that are heroic. They are the ones that build and strengthen the community.

It may be making coffee or doing dishes. It may be in the church or in the garden. It may be on Sunday morning or during the week. It may be in-person or on-line. It may be solo or as part of a team.

Every act of caring is a response to the call of the Good Shepherd who cares for us..

Thanks be to God.

Readings: John 10:1-10  
Acts 2:42-47  
Psalm 23