

April 26 Worship

Readers- Cathy Johnson & Nancy Rogers

Announcements/Joys

Time Of Quiet Meditation- *“For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out.”* Ezekiel 34:11

Opening Scripture- Psalm 23(page 476)

Opening Chorus- 538- Lord, Be Glorified

Responsive Call To Worship-

Leader: Day by day, God leads us: to the deep, deep pools of peace.

People: To the green, lush lawns of grace.

Leader: Day by day, Jesus calls us: to pour out ourselves in service.

People: To anoint the stranger with hope.

Leader: Day by day, the Holy Spirit shows us: the community we could be.

People: The family we are called to become.

Hymn of Praise- 41- Ye Servants Of God, Your Master Proclaim

Unison Prayer/Lord's Prayer- Holy God, We long for your peace, and trust in your promise; we hear your call to turn toward you, to change our lives and welcome you in. Meet us here and fill our minds with your wisdom and our hearts with your peace, that our worship together may open us to the challenge of your dream of wholeness for all. In the Name of the One who is coming, He who taught us to pray, saying...*Lord's Prayer...*

“Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

Gloria Patri- Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. World without end.
Amen, Amen.

Old Testament Scripture- Isaiah 40:3-11(page 619)

Special Music- “He Lives In Me” (Doyle Lawson)

Gospel Scripture- John 10:1-10(page 933)

Children's Time/Echo Prayer/Passing of the Peace

Hymn- 362- There's A Wideness In God's Mercy

New Testament Scripture- 1 Peter 2:19-25(page 1059)

Message

“Leave The Gate Open”

I don't know if you have noticed, we are living in confusing times. It is difficult enough for us to listen to what is happening in the world but we are constantly bombarded by visual reminders of every kind of event that results in a sensory overload that threatens to overwhelm our senses. If we are not careful, we will find ourselves unable to concentrate on what is important in our lives and our ability to cope with the world may be hindered. It is more than important for us to remove ourselves from the constant noise that distract us from doing what is correct and good for ourselves and our families.

In our gospel reading this morning, Jesus shows us where we must go in order to get away from the madness. He uses the metaphor of a sheepfold to teach us where we can find protection and safety from all those things that threaten our safety and security. In order for us to enter this sheepfold, we need to go in through the gate where Jesus is the gatekeeper. Those who enter are those people that know, and who are known, by Jesus. Jesus refers to His people as His sheep. The use of this metaphor of us as sheep creates a problem for many people. Our human pride does not like for us to be sheep. We visualize ourselves as creatures a bit higher in the chain than mere sheep.

God first compared the Israelite's to sheep and later applied that label to all who are called by His name. God's people are compared to sheep for several reasons; First of all, sheep are one of the few animals that do not have a defense system. Sheep are helpless without a shepherd. The first line of the 23rd Psalm reflects the wonderful truth that God Himself is our Defender: “The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” Without the Lord our Shepherd, we are helpless when our enemy Satan attacks. Second, sheep are notorious for following the leader, regardless of how dangerous or foolish that may be. Like sheep, human beings are extremely gullible when an attractive or charismatic leader promises a shiny new idea. History is replete with tragic illustrations of the “herd mentality” in action. That sheep-like mentality was in evidence when Pilate brought Jesus before the people to ask what

should be done with Him. Only days before, Jesus had been the popular Teacher who healed, forgave, and taught about God. People eagerly followed Him. But, less than a week later, “the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.” Within moments, the very crowd that had witnessed His miracles was shouting, “Crucify Him!”

We don't have to look too far back in history to find plenty of examples of groups of people turning into mobs with very bad intentions. Just take a good look around at people today who riot and destroy just because. There are plenty of so-called leaders who have found it in their power to incite people into acts that they would never contemplate on their own. As much as we would like to be compared to something a bit more substantial than sheep, we are not.

A third reason human beings are compared to sheep in the Bible is that sheep are prone to wander away from the flock. A sheep's only chance of survival is with the flock under the care of a competent shepherd. Yet sheep become overconfident, rebellious, or distracted, and they wander away. They spy greener grass in the other direction or fail to notice when the flock moves away. Peter had this tendency in mind when he warned the church to be on the alert because the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. A lion does not attack the flock. It waits until a solitary lamb wanders too far from the shepherd. One of Jesus' most famous parables is about a lamb that strayed so far it became lost. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, left the ninety-nine sheep in the fold and went in search of the one lost lamb. In my mind, there is nothing wrong with being compared to a sheep.

Jesus not only refers to Himself as the Shepherd, He also calls Himself the Gatekeeper. It is Jesus who calls to us to enter in and be protected. It is His voice that we need to become familiar with so that we know who we are dealing with. There are a multitude of voices that call out to us constantly trying to get our attention. I can assure you that when we are in a crowd, we can recognize certain voices through the noise of the crowd. I know, that when my mother called to me when I was out playing with a bunch of my friends, no matter how noisy we were, I could hear my mother. Now this does not mean that I always answered, but I did hear her. It is more than important that we develop a relationship with Jesus that makes us so familiar with His voice that we can never say that we couldn't recognize Him.

In Jesus' “Sermon on the Mount”, the Lord presents a word picture of two gates, one wide and one narrow. Jesus explains to His listeners that to see and participate in His coming kingdom a person must have true, inner righteousness and not simply an external adherence to a code of laws. The scribes and Pharisees were teaching a kind of works-based salvation, asserting that obedience to the law was how people could be right in the sight of God. Jesus counters that directly, saying poignantly

that, unless a person's righteousness surpassed that of the scribes and Pharisees, that person would not enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus describes two gates: the wide gate, taken by many, that leads to destruction; and the narrow gate, taken by few, that leads to life. One gate is wide to accommodate the many who enter the way leading to destruction, while the other is narrow to represent the relatively few who seek life and find it. Jesus exhorts His listeners to enter through the narrow gate rather than attempting to enter through the broad gate. The "Broad Gate" is that which those who are of the world mistakenly believe is the easy way to salvation. The "Narrow Gate" requires us to walk a narrow path that forces us to keep ourselves in a straighter line and discipline ourselves to follow God's laws.

I have heard it said that Jesus opened the gates to heaven for all of humanity, allowing everyone to enter. This is true, but we must understand that there are rules governing our access and not everyone is willing to accept those rules and will not enter based on their own will. God wants everyone to be saved but He understands that there are those who do not want to be saved. The Gates to Heaven are open for all who believe and are willing to submit to God's will and accept His love. Are we ready and willing to go through that gate and make sure that we don't close it behind us? Praise Be to God. Amen.

Prayers of the People- Lord God, Jesus said that he came to that we might life and have it abundantly. We praise you and we thank you for his purpose in coming and we pray to you that we might indeed experience the fullness of the life that he has promised. Take from us, O Lord, all those things that get in the way of our relationship with you, our pride and self-certainty, our doubt and our fear, and all those things that come from our human nature that blind us to the wonders of your presence and the glory of what you are doing in our midst. Lord, you know very well how our traditions and our understandings can become instruments of judgment rather than tools of your grace. We pray today O God for all those who have been hurt by our thoughtless insistence that our particular way is the only right way. Touch the hearts of those who have turned away from you because we have caused your light within us to grow dim and brighten. Lord, we thank you for the refreshing wind of your Spirit, for how you breathe into us new life and new hope and lead us to new understandings. In you we find wholeness for both body and soul. We pray now, O God, that this wholeness may not only not only grow within us, but that it might enter into and transform the lives of those whom we name before you at this time. We lift them up, O Lord, and also we lift up those situations and those persons, in thanksgiving, and with prayers of intercession, that you have placed upon our hearts this day. We pray all these things, O God, in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord and our Savior, our brother and our friend. Amen.

Closing Hymn- 589- O Jesus I Have Promised

Benediction- Go now with your trust in the good shepherd, and let us love, not just in words, but in truth and action. Believe in the name of Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he has commanded us. And may God be at your side, even in valleys of death. May Christ Jesus be the cornerstone of your life. And may the Holy Spirit abide in you, and tend you with love and mercy all the days of your life. We go in peace to love and serve the Lord, In the name of Christ. Amen.