FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Nu’uanu Congregational Church

Jeannie D. Thompson

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*All-In* John 10:11-18

In the poetic language of the King James:

1The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:

 he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3He restoreth my soul:

 he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness

 for his name’s sake.

4Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

 I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;

 thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5Thou preparest a table before me in the presence

 of mine enemies:

thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

 all the days of my life:

and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Today, the fourth Sunday of Easter, is Good Shepherd Sunday. And when we think of the Good Shepherd, we not only think of Jesus, most of us will also think of the 23rd Psalm. This is appropriate and helpful for at least two reasons. First, because it presents us with the details of what a Good Shepherd *is*—ie. a competent, thoughtful caretaker of sheep. The Good Shepherd is one who leads us to abundance and abundant goodness.

The second reason is that, as we read and pray through the psalm we are presented with what is supposed to be *our* relationship with God. *We* are the sheep, and therefore dependent on the Good Shepherd for everything—for food and clean water, the Good Shepherd will always lead us in ways that nourish us physically.

But also, because we are led into paths of *righteousness*—into lives of justice and honesty—with the Good Shepherd’s care and guidance, we can lay down our heads at night and sleep protected from the danger of inner conflict or turmoil. We are even shielded from the enemies of doubt and guilt because the Good Shepherd is patient and merciful with us. With the Good Shepherd, we can even face death without fear; perhaps even with an easy mind and heart.

But wait, there is more! There always is with God.

In the passage from the Gospel of John we heard this morning, Jesus declares that *he* is the Good Shepherd. As he speaks, we hear that he is doing all of what the 23rd Psalm proscribes *and more*, *much* more.

Jesus says that a *Good* Shepherd will go above and beyond his role as a guider of sheep. A *Good* Shepherd will even give his life for his sheep. Yes, he will even stand between the sheep and death—this is because the *Good* Shepherd who *loves* the sheep. He is not just hired to do a job. A Good Shepherd gathers in the sheep as one does one’s own children…because that is who we are. We are more than a job. We are God’s beloved. We are family.

The verses that were read for us this morning are a small part of a larger story that started in chapter nine. Jesus had spread mud (made from his own spittle) on to the man’s eye’s and sent him to wash in the Pool of Siloam.

The man did as he was told and was, as you can imagine, startled and delighted when he could see again. So were his neighbors and everyone who had known him. Whereas, in that day, he was separated from others because he could not see, he has now been brought back into wholeness with the community.

The Pharisees, however, are suspicious and irritated because this has been done on the sabbath. They question the former blind man and his parents. No one can tell them who healed him—not even the man himself because he has never actually seen Jesus. He has only heard the sound of his voice. Eventually, they do figure out who has done this, who has dared to heal on the sabbath, and they go and confront Jesus, at which point Jesus reveals that *he* is the Good Shepherd.

In fact, Jesus says much more. Just as he has brought this one man back into community, Jesus says “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” [v. 16]

So, this is what the one healing of one person is about. Indeed, in healing the man born blind, it is important that the man does not, at first, know who has healed him. What is important is that he has believed *without* seeing. He has believed because of how his life has been changed.

The man born blind has received his sight, but more than that, he has regained his part in the life of the community. He will not be alone again, nor without sight. He will *see* the goodness and compassion of God throughout his life because of how Jesus has touched his life.

He will *see* how Jesus risked himself for him—beginning with the interrogation by the Pharisees. Eventually, he will see how Jesus will, indeed, “lay down his life,” will stand between people, like him, and death. He will do this so that we may have abundant life, even eternal life.

Needless to say: Jesus was all-in, when it came to teaching and protecting the people. We were, and have always been, his beloved people. And the abundant life he wants us to have is a life wherein we are seen and recognized as members of his people—even when we are not known to the established community, the *dominant* community. I was reminded of this a few weeks ago when I heard that this was the 60th anniversary of the Merrie Monarch Festival.

Before 1964, there was a small but growing movement among young Hawaiian people. They had been learning the history and culture of their people from their *kupuna.* It was a history and culture rarely mentioned with any seriousness or respect, in the greater community.

Fortunately, the music from the likes of [Gabby Pahinui](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabby_Pahinui) and his work with the [Sons of Hawaii](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sons_of_Hawaii), or [Keola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keola_Beamer) and [Kapono Beamer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kapono_Beamer)’s traditionalist [slack-key](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slack-key) music—none of this could be denied or kept hidden. It was just too good, too vibrant and filled with life.

Starting in the 1970’s this period in Hawaiian history is also associated with a renewed interest in [Hawaiian language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawaiian_language), in [Pidgin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawaiian_Pidgin), [Hula](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hula), [Traditional Hawaiian Crafts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawaiian_art), [Hawaiian Studies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawaiian_Studies), and other cultural items. Indeed, this period in an increase in Hawaiian self-identity largely inspired by the 1964 essay, *On Being Hawaiian,* by writer [John Dominis Holt, IV](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Dominis_Holt%2C_IV), who brought pride back to being Hawaiian after decades of negative stereotype.

I was reminded of the Hawaiian Renaissance, which, by-the-way, was the *Second* Renaissance, because of the way it took courage, and an inherent sense of worthiness, of being beloved, and of believing that their talent and creativeness was sacred—that is: inspired and blessed by God—that had to have given those young Hawaiians the energy and boldness to step forward and lift-up the gifts they had been given.

You may remember, as I do, that their struggle to affirm the goodness and the equality of their language, history, and culture was not met with universal acceptance—not in the beginning. Even now, land rights, Hawaiian Homeland properties, and cultural respect is still a struggle in some areas.

What Jesus’ discussion with the Pharisees shows us is that Jesus is determined to bring people together, to break down the barriers that divide us so that we may be together as one flock—as one people. What is more: he is committed to doing everything he can—including laying down his own life—to make sure that this happens.

What Jesus knows is that the people—that *we*—have suffered for much too long under *bad* shepherds who have scattered the flock rather than brought us together in peace. Jesus also knows how diligently the bad shepherds continue to work to keep us divided so that they may prosper—divide and conquer is the motto.

Into the divisions that plague our world—even our communities—is the *Good* Shepherd who teaches us humility, respect for ourselves and others, and the promise that we can be one people—even in our diversity. We can do and be this if we will continue to listen for the voice of goodness and righteousness, the voice that gathers and commends, the voice that can make us whole.

Let us pray:

Holy and Risen Savior, open our hearts and minds to your power and presence. May God’s Spirit be here, leading us toward a more mature faith, nurturing our hope and embracing us in love. Lord, remind us that the Scriptures proclaim to us of God’s abiding and forgiving love. Remind us, Lord, that you have called us to be peacemakers. Our world is so divided and troubled. Now we need your great and worthy guidance to take up the message and practice of grace and peacekeepking. May we be persons of redeeming love and reconciling peace. In the name of Jesus, who has laid down his one life that we might be made one and live in peace. Amen.