

**Resurrection Abundance**  
**April 29 and 30, 2023**  
**Fourth Sunday of Easter**

**Acts 2:42-47, I Peter 2:19-25, John 10:1-10**

**John 10:10 - The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.**

Dear Christian friends,

Years ago, I visited a dear Christian woman named Dorothy in the Alzheimer wing of a certain Mankato Nursing Home. I entered through a locked door, enjoyed a pleasant visit with her, shared with her a devotion, a prayer, and Holy Communion. All was well until I tried to leave the unit. I could not find the door. I went to where I thought the door would be, but it wasn't there. I walked around a bit and asked directions from a man who I thought was on staff there, but he turned out to be a resident. He just sort of stared at me. Finally I found a nurse and quickly explained that I was a pastor. I really was, and could she show me the door to get out of here? She smiled and pointed a few feet away to a door that had been painted so as to look like a book shelf and explained that this way residents would be less likely to be banging on the door to get out.

There was only one correct way to get in or exit that particular unit of Hillcrest Nursing Home, and it was a lesson everyone needed to learn. So also in our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus identifies Himself as the door of the sheep. Only the sheep who enter through this door will be able to lie down in green pastures and be led beside the still waters. Only those who enter by this door will have life and have it abundantly.

Pleasure seekers among us would say that true abundance is in money and all of the happiness money can buy. Workaholics among us would say that true satisfaction is in working hard and achieving all kinds of success. The party crowd would focus on the good times that come along with drinking, status seekers would fix their eyes on climbing the social ladder, busy bees would argue that true abundance is in staying active and getting our to-do lists done.

In contrast to all of that, Jesus would teach us today that the truly abundant life is in fact to be in the sheepfold under the protective care of the Good Shepherd, it is for Him to be calling us by name, it is for us to be listening to his voice and to be gathered into his flock and to be made to lie down in green pastures and to be led beside still waters.

**The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.**

The thieves and robbers to which Jesus was referring in John 10 were the Pharisees and scribes of his day who were blind to the fact that Jesus was in fact the Messiah for whom they had been waiting! They were harming the flock by insisting on Old Testament rules and regulations as an entrance to the kingdom of God. They were leading the masses away from the abundant Christian life instead of towards it. Jesus, on the other hand, had come to watch over the flock, to protect the flock, and to lead them safely through present dangers into heavenly joy.

Our overall sermon series theme is “Raised with Christ,” as we explore what it means to set our hearts on things that are above instead of earthly matters. Two weekends ago - *Resurrection Faith* - 1) Rejoicing in God’s patience and 2) Trusting in God’s Plan. Last week - *Resurrection Conversations* - 1) Jesus conducting perfect conversation and 2) culminating in table fellowship

Today’s theme is *Resurrection Abundance*. We would learn from each of our three appointed lessons one aspect of what it means to lie down in green pastures and be led beside still waters, what it means to be led in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake, what it means for Jesus to be with us and for his rod and staff to comfort us, what it means for him to prepare a table before us in the presence of our enemies, for him to anoint our heads with oil, for our cup to be overflowing, for goodness and mercy to be following us around all the days of our lives.

**Resurrection abundance is to live with glad and generous hearts. (Acts 2:42-47)**

In last week’s sermon, we saw Jesus conduct the perfect conversation. He took the two disciples on the road to Emmaus from Point A, which was a mindset full of disappointment and confusion to Point B, where their hearts were burning with resurrection joy and eagerness to spread the good news.

Acts 2 gives us a description of an early church where that good news of great joy was spreading. Their fellowship was as healthy as it could be. They weren’t just going through the motions in terms of hearing God’s Word; they were devoted to the teachings of the apostles. Their fellowship wasn’t just a superficial time of cookies and coffee, they were listening to each other’s hearts and caring for each

other. As often as they celebrated their Lord's Supper, Jesus was holding them close, their sins were forgiven, and their faith was strengthened.

Luke remarks how the Spirit was alive and well in their midst. Signs and wonders were amazing and plentiful- God was with them, and He was for them and His Spirit was inside of them. Believers were caring for each other, even if that meant selling their possessions and distributing for the common good. The end result was that their gladness in their hearts was spilling over in a generous and contagious manner into the lives of others - in such a way that others were being attracted to Christ and His Church.

When I think of a glad and generous heart, I think of a woman named Ursala, who lives a few doors down from us in our 55+ community. She is elderly, bent over, and as sweet and kind as a lady can be. She is famous for spending hours in the heat of the day pulling weeds and cleaning up the common area. Our dog will spot her two blocks away and sprint towards her. She calls Gabby "Poopsie" and gives her between five and ten treats every time. It is as if her head has been anointed with oil, her cup is overflowing, and the goodness and mercy of her Good Shepherd have been following her around all the days of her life.

Secondly, we learn that **Resurrection abundance is to develop immunity to the enemies of the faith.**

During the heyday of Covid 19, there was a lot of talk about "herd immunity." *Herd immunity was defined by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention as "a situation in which a sufficient proportion of a population is immune to an infectious disease through vaccination and/or prior illness to make its spread from person to person unlikely."*

In today's Epistle Lesson, Peter writes that **He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.** And then he adds, **"By his wounds you have been healed."** Isaiah elaborates that the suffering servant would be wounded for our transgressions, he would be crushed for our iniquities, upon him would be the chastisement that brings us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.

Today I invite you to think of our life together in the Church as developing herd immunity to the enemies of our faith. In Holy Baptism, the sign of the cross is placed on our foreheads and upon our hearts, and the forgiveness of sins is delivered into our souls.

A type of herd immunity is built up over time, as moms and dads teach their children the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. Their grandmas and their grandpas teach them that Jesus loves them and that in every one of their days they can flee for refuge to God who is their very present help in trouble. Their pastors and teachers catechize them and guide them into the truths of Scripture which are able to set them free. Even when they stray - and oh how often they do stray off the straight and the narrow into all kinds of foolishness - they know they are always welcome back into the safety of the sanctuary, and into the arms of their crucified, risen, and ascended Savior

Resurrection abundance, dear friends, is first of all to live with glad and generous hearts. Secondly it is to develop immunity against the enemies of our faith.

And third, **Resurrection abundance is to rest safe and secure in the Good Shepherd's flock.**

*The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice*

In John chapter 10, Jesus declares himself not only to be the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep, but also the door through whom the sheep gain access to the pen each night. Here we have a beautiful picture of what congregational life can be here on earth, as we travel through the ups and down of life together. As a good shepherd would know each of his sheep by name, a good pastor will be able to call his members by name and be interested in their stories. As a good shepherd would inspect his sheep for disease and infection day after day, so will congregational life include pastors and members caring for, listening to, encouraging, and praying for one another. As a good shepherd works long hours to find good pastures and still waters and safe places for his sheep, so do pastors and people spend time in God's Word, they are devoted to the teachings of the apostles, they work hard to pass the baton of faith to one generation after another.

Three symbols of a shepherd are worth remembering. His staff, his rod, and his voice.

- The shepherd would use his staff to lovingly reach down into a hole, slip the staff under the lamb, and gently lift him to safety.

- The shepherd would use his rod not only to fight off the wolves and the coyotes, but also discipline the sheep when they need it. Much as the father disciplines a son in love in order to teach him a lesson with regard to the future. Much as a vinedresser prunes his vines in order to bear more fruit. Much as a shepherd might break the leg of a lamb so that the lamb would not stray.
- The third symbol of the shepherd is his voice. The sheep in Bible times were not raised for their meat, but for their wool. Their life span was 20-25 years. Over time, the sheep would get to know their shepherd's voice. They would be treated as pets and part of the family. Many of the sheep would have names and were known in a personal way by shepherds of Bible times.

**My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.**

I've talked before about my father, who was a shepherd boy in the hills of southeastern North Dakota / dust bowl years / 1925 - 1938 / would watch over family flock with his trusty sheep dog, pony / keep sheep out of neighbor's fields / bring them in at night / May through September / age 5 - 15. Later in life I asked if he grew fond of sheep. He answered, "No. I hated them. They were stupid."

The Kingdom of God is like a shepherd who loved his sheep so much He laid down his own life for them. Not only because his father sent him to do so, but because he wanted to do so.

The kingdom of God is like a resurrected shepherd who has billions of sheep in his flock, and he knows every one of them by name. All kinds of voices call out to them day after day, but they prefer his voice above all others.

The Kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers full of folks who work hard at knowing each other by name. Their best days start with making the sign of the cross and remembering that they are the baptized and forgiven people of God. They are increasingly famous for confessing their sins to one another and listening to each other's hearts. As often as they do so, the grace of God has a way of sweeping over their collective souls, And instead of just sort of going through the motions of lukewarm Christianity, these folks find themselves tasting what could be called Resurrection Abundance.