

Liturgy for Sunday May 3, 2020

Easter 4

Notes on the Worship Service

+ Bishop Aitken has given all our Rostered Ministers the week-end of May 1-3 off in honor of their faithful work and tireless efforts at ingenuity during the “Stay at home” period. This liturgy and sermon is for use in congregations across the Northeastern Minnesota Synod. It was videoed at Knife River Lutheran Church, Knife River, Minnesota. Preacher is +Bishop Tom Aitken, Assisting Minister is Pr. Susan Berge (Pastor at Knife River Lutheran) and pianist is Carol Carlson. Staff Administrative Assistant Sarah Roe videoed and put together the service. An accompanying written Liturgy is provided for your use and you are encouraged to sing along with the music, read the Psalm together, sing the responses to the prayers of the church, and provide an offering for the ongoing ministries of your congregation. Bishop Aitken reminds us all to continue to stay in place, and worship with your congregation’s or a neighboring one’s online worship services until further notice. God’s peace to all of you during this continued pandemic.

Announcements

Prelude

Order of Worship

Bishop: Invocation

Confession/Absolution

Bishop: Blessed be the Holy Trinity, +One God, who forgives all our sin, whose mercy endures forever. Amen. Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Most merciful God,

All: We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

Bishop: In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for his sake God forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

All: Glory to God (sung together)

Prayer of the Day

Bishop: O God our Shepherd, you know your sheep by name and lead us to safety through the valleys of death. Guide us by your voice that we may walk in certainty and security to the joyous feast prepared in your house, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Scripture Lessons

Psalm 23

The Holy Gospel: John 10:1-10

Sermon Bishop Thomas Aitken

Hymn Children of the Heavenly Father # 781 (verses 1,2)

Apostle's Creed

Prayers of the Church

Note: After each petition, all sing together “Shepherd me O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life” ELW #780

Lord's Prayer

Offering *Please give your offering to your local congregation's ministries*

Hymn: Now the Green Blade Rises ELW #731 (verses 1,4)

Benediction

Bishop The God of all grace, +Bless you now and forever, Amen.

Closing: Hymn: “God be with you till we meet again” ELW #536 (verse 1,2)

Dismissal

Bishop: Go in Peace, Serve the Lord

ALL: “Thanks be to God”

Scripture Lessons
Sunday, May 3, 2020
Easter 4

Psalm 23

A Psalm of David.

¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;

³ he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.

Gospel: John 10:1-10

10 ‘Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.’ ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

7 So again Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Bp Aitken Synod Sermon

May 3, 2020 Easter 4

Lessons: Psalm 23, John 10:1-10

Dear beloved in our Synod,
Grace and peace to you, through Christ our brother, our Good Shepherd, and Lord.

Psalm 23, appointed as one of the lessons today, is the best known passage of Scripture in the whole world, and one of the most powerful ones. Let's look and listen to how this psalm, linked together today with Jesus in our gospel lesson brings new life to us in our "Valley of the Shadow of death."

The person who wrote Psalm 23 was on a journey. Like yours and mine, it was a journey of life and of faith. Something happened to this person, something tragic. You live long enough and you'll experience not only the beauty but also the pain of life. It will happen. And you will have questions that Psalm 23 addresses honestly. You might be worried today about a loved one who could easily get the coronavirus. Or maybe you have already lost a friend or relative to it. You may be living with another "dark valley" right now with that relative whose life has hit bottom with deep anxiety, chemical dependency, or loss of income to take care of your family.

The bad thing that happens to this Biblical writer shows up in the very middle of the psalm. In Verse 4, "Even though I walk through the *darkest valley* (or, in earlier translations, "*the valley of the shadow of death*") are the words that describe the author's tragedy.

Before verse four, things went well: There were quiet waters, lush green pastures and life was good, then the tragedy happens. We don't know what it was; it could have been that the Psalmist experienced the death of a family member, or that death was approaching soon. Or it could have been an illness that would force the Psalmist or a loved one out of the community in those days, or a huge rejection or betrayal. But something tragic happened. The author does not mince words or cover this tragedy with sugary piety. Notice how Psalm 23 does not declare that God keeps pious people safe from all harm or that your life will be danger-free if you pray, read scripture and do good things. It doesn't say that those who love God will receive a protection bubble from illness or the power of wind, water or gravity. I once had an Intern, back in the 90's who wrote a paper for Seminary entitled, "Into every Life a little rain must Fall." And of course this is true. We used that paper as a resource for faith and bible study and the problem of evil and natural tragedies. That can be helpful, well and good for when there are no pandemics, when your own life isn't in the balance. What we are getting in Psalm 23 is more: it is the real life journey of faith that ends in strength and new life in the midst of tragedy.

Hear the Good News in this famous Psalm. In the last half of Psalm 23 we get in on how the writer has experienced God in some powerful way, right in the valley of the shadow of death. God doesn't abandon us but leads us through the dangers. Psalm 23 invites us to experience living with trust in the goodness of God. Back in seminary I was introduced to the devotional writings of first century rabbis. I came across one who wrote a morning prayer I have never forgotten. He wrote, "O Holy One, if this were the *only*

day You would have granted me to live, for this day alone, I give you eternal thanks.”

Now Hear the Psalm again: “Even though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me. You prepare a table before me ***in the presence of*** my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.” (Verses 4-6)

Many of you know that my good friend and mentor of 35 years, Pastor Earl Carlson died on Easter Sunday just a few weeks ago. He was 101 years old and we talked right up to his last days. What the Psalmist says about God’s goodness, even in the midst of tragedy is exactly what Earl taught me over and over. He was born with polio – and it remained in his body all his life until in his old age he was bent in half from the waist. I remember many people saying to him, “Why you, Earl? You are so kind, so helpful, you bring us such joy. Why do you have to suffer, why did God let this happen to you?” And you know what he would say?

“Why *not* me”? Life is good, Life is beautiful. This kind of thing happens to many people, why should I be different? And just remember, like you my life is joined to Jesus’ life forever.”

Jesus knew, didn’t he, what it meant to live in God’s world, with goodness, risks, and tragedy. He entered it and through his life, death and resurrection showed God’s power in the midst of all that life can bring us. He was not ashamed to call us – as you know –

sisters and brothers to him. He is the pioneer and perfector of our own faith, standing with us in the midst of our weakness and fear to bring new life into us when we need it most.

God is not a magic rabbit's foot, or lucky charm. God is the love that brings us hope, the strength to live in adversity, the courage to stand against evil, the joy to live life abundantly as Jesus says in our Gospel lesson today: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (verse 10) And God is the power to endure suffering as the Psalmist proclaims and the power to serve our neighbor as Martin Luther always reminded his flock.

We may wish God had made a different kind of world. But this is the world God made and God is still working in, redeeming all of creation, all of humankind, even our last "enemies" and tragedies. Christ says to you today: 'I am your gate, I am your shepherd, I am your bread, your sustenance, your resurrection and life. 'And he will bring us home one day. You can count on it, today, tomorrow, next week, the rest of your lives and into Eternity.

Trust the Story. Trust Jesus. Trust the gospel.
To the glory of God, and the good of your neighbor.

Amen.

Glory to God (pg. 139)

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly king, almighty God and Father,
We worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God,
You take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us;
You are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,
You alone are the most high Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
In the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
Born of the virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, died, and was buried;
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
He ascended into heaven,
He is seated at the right hand of the Father,
And he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
The holy catholic church,
The communion of saints,
The forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body,
And the life everlasting. Amen.

Hymns

Children of the Heavenly Father #781, Versus 1 and 2

Children of the heav'nly Father
Safely in His bosom gather;
Nestling bird nor star in heaven
Such a refuge e'er was given.

God His own doth tend and nourish;
In His holy courts they flourish;
From all evil things He spares them;
In His mighty arms He bears them.

Now the Green Blade Rises #379, Versus 1 and 4

Now the green blade riseth from the buried grain,
Wheat that in dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again, like wheat arising green.

When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
Your touch can call us back to life again;
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again, like wheat arising green.

God be with you till we meet again #536, Versus 1 and 2

God be with you till we meet again,
By His counsels guide, uphold you,
With His sheep securely fold you,
God be with you till we meet again.

Refrain

Till we meet, till we meet,
Till we meet at Jesus' feet;
Till we meet, till we meet,
God be with you till we meet again.

God be with you till we meet again,
'Neath His wings protecting hide you,
Daily manna still divide you,
God be with you till we meet again. [Refrain]

Prayers of Intercession: May 3, 2020

In our separate homes, but gathered together in the Spirit, let us pray for the church, the world, and all in need. After each petition ends with the words, “Hear us, gracious Lord”, we will sing the refrain, “Shepherd me O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life.”

Shepherding God, draw us closer to You as our Good Shepherd, trusting in Your guidance and following Your lead. Give us hearts to love you, minds to know you, and wills to serve you. Draw us daily into closer communion with you and into closer community with those around us. Hear us, gracious Lord...

God of resurrection, from the very beginning you give the church the gift of witnesses, as preachers, teachers, and pastors. Bless all who proclaim the good news at this time, especially our local pastors, our Bishop, Tom Aitkin, and our Presiding Bishop, Elizabeth Eaton. Hear us, gracious Lord ...

We give thanks for the technology by which we stay connected; for the food we have; for support of our community of faith. Bless the creativity of worship leaders during this time, especially for all who are assisting the digital sharing of worship, that the faithful be nourished. Hear us, gracious Lord ...

We lift up to you our distraught world facing the coronavirus; for countries hardest hit; for those who grieve their dead; for the sick and their families; for those who are quarantined or stranded away from home; for those fearful of an unknown future; for the millions of unemployed; for all service workers; for children at home; for hospitals, in their desperate need for supplies; for physicians, nurses, home health aides and medical researchers. Hear us, gracious Lord ...

We pray for peace and justice in the world: for an end to war and international turmoil; for concord in our troubled society; for the heads of state, legislators, and local civic leaders, that they enact wise procedures to deal with the coronavirus, and in distributing governmental economic aid. Hear us, gracious Lord ...

Into your hands, Shepherding God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your grace and mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Gathered together by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us:

**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 trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.**