

New Hope Lutheran Church

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April 25, 2021
4th Sunday of Easter

Coming Events

All services have been cancelled.

Apr 27 3:30pm Worship & Music **Zoom**
Apr 27 6:30pm Zoom Raamatupiiri

Mother's Day bilingual zoom service

For Mother's Day, May 9, 2021 at 10:00am, we are planning a bilingual service by **zoom only**. If you would like to take part, please send the office an email to let us know. Then on May 8, 2021 you will receive an invitation with instructions to join.

In our prayers Fred, Esme, Martha.

Prayer of the Day

O Lord Christ, good shepherd of the sheep, you seek the lost and guide us into your fold. Feed us, and we shall be satisfied; heal us, and we shall be whole. Make us one with you, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn – Good Christian Friends Rejoice and Sing -
www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9IJtV0NEbs

Psalm 23

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,
3 he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.
4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will 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 your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

First Reading "Acts 4:5 – 12"

5 The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. **6** Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. **7** They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?" **8** Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! **9** If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, **10** then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. **11** Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone." **12** Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

Second Reading "1 John 3:16 – 24"

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. **17** If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? **18** Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. **19** This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: **20** If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. **21** Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God **22** and receive from him

anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. **23** And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. **24** The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

Gospel "John 10:11 – 18"

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. **12** The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. **13** The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. **14** "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—**15** just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. **16** I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. **17** The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. **18** No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

Sermon

By Rev. Nathan Fong

O God, may we hear your voice speaking to us this day as we are led by your Spirit to follow your paths of love and truth, through Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd. Amen.

Have you ever felt like you just didn't belong? I know I have. See, way back when dial-up internet still roamed the earth, I was in high school just being all teenager-like. I was still finding out who I was, defining my personality, and figuring out how I fit in my family, among my friends, and in the world. And if the "pork chapsh and apple shawsch" episode of *The Brady Bunch* taught me anything, it's that I'm not the only one who went through this type of existential crisis.

I think the school administration figured that I wouldn't be the only one, so to aid in the process they had all the students in grades 10 and 11 I think it was, take these career aptitude tests. Perhaps you know what I'm talking about. Basically they are an extensive list of very personal questions that we answer as honestly as possible and they're supposed to help you

discover your perfect career. It's sort of like a paper form of Tinder, but for jobs.

Anyway, I think I did at least a half dozen of these tests throughout those years, just because each one had a different slant to them and perhaps would give you more ideas. I don't know. But strangely enough for me, while my friends kept getting all these cool jobs like doctor, lawyer, and race car driver, I seemed to always get basically the same answers. In first place without fail, I'd get religious leader/Rabbi/priest. But in second place, I'd get plumber and once I got sanitation worker. Nothing against plumbers or sanitation workers, but really?

And of course, all my friends scoffed at my first place answer, not because they were against religion or anything like that, but more because...well...I'm not really religious leader/Rabbi/priest material. First of all, I'm not Jewish so that can be scratched right off the list. But while I was raised in the church and actually kind of enjoyed being in the church, I wasn't your typical religious kid. I didn't fit the stereotype that most people have in their heads. Even members of my own family even once said that they don't think that I'm cut out for it because I didn't have the demeanour or intellect of a pastor, also they warned me that my paycheque as a pastor wouldn't allow me to afford all the stuff that I'd want. Basically, I was too goofy, too dumb, and too materialistic to make it in this field.

But that started something in me. Actually, it just continued something that was already in me since I was in grade 6, but that's for a different sermon. But in spite of the naysayers I continued on this path toward vocational congregational ministry and here I am.

Well who's laughing now?

....nobody. Nobody's laughing now.

But you can see how I felt like I didn't belong. I felt it with my friends who thought it was weird that this kid that grew up with them doing all the urban kid stuff with them would become a pastor. I felt it with my family who thought I wasn't cut from the right kind of cloth and wanted "better" for me. And then I started to feel it within myself as all the things they said continued to ring in my mind, causing doubt, suspicion, and fear.

"I am the Good Shepherd," Jesus says in today's gospel lesson, "I know my own and my own know me."

That sounds real pretty, Jesus, but if you know me so well, why did you put me in this position where I feel this way? Why did you burn this passion within me for the gospel and its proclamation? Why did you call me, of all people, to serve you in this way?

Because clearly, I don't belong. Clearly, I don't fit in. Clearly, I don't have what it takes if I have doubt within myself of myself, my abilities and talents or lack thereof, and how long I can last without trying to make an inappropriate joke.

And so I wonder how many of us might feel the same way. Maybe we feel like we don't belong as well, maybe we feel like we can't do much to help further the kingdom of God because we aren't talented enough or knowledgeable enough or whatever enough to make it. Maybe we have felt the call into ministry but brushed it off because if Jesus really knew us, there's no way he'd even consider us for anything remotely close to that. Maybe we've thought that.

But Jesus' words here don't sound facetious at all, do they? I don't think Jesus isn't lying about knowing us here. He probably isn't pulling a prank and just waiting for us to fall on our faces and be all like, "Just kidding! Got ya!" Which is kind of a pity as that would be kind of hilarious and quite honestly something that I would do. Maybe not to any of you, mind you, but to my kids for sure.

No, Jesus words here are to encourage us. Reassure us. Empower us and lift us up and remind us that even when the world tells us that we aren't good enough or don't belong, God continues to call by name and invites us and welcomes us into Jesus' one flock where he is the shepherd and we are known, blessed, and dearly loved. His words here are a promise that have not, are not, and cannot ever be broken.

What always strikes me in this passage is how Jesus talks about these "other sheep" that don't belong to this fold, and yet they are also just as included and welcome. As we all might have had that experience of not belonging, perhaps we've also felt that there are these "others" that don't belong. Whatever the case may be, I see Jesus here talking to us about them. Reminding us that they do, in fact, belong. And at the same time, I see Jesus here talking to *them* about *us*. Telling them that we too, in fact, belong. Revealing to us all that, in whatever demographic we find ourselves in or identify with, on whatever margins we feel like we're residing just outside of, within

whatever label that we associate ourselves with or has been unwillingly affixed to us, we belong.

Not because we fit any kind of divinely predetermined mold that people expect of us. Not because we've earned enough points to get us in that higher tier of life and God's grace. Not because we're the sheepest sheep that ever sheepled in the flock. But because Jesus knows us, through and through, and has decided to love us anyway. And not just to love us, but to equip us and empower us to be God's children in the world: flawed but cherished, broken but healed, sinners but regarded as saints.

See, regardless of how we might feel about who we are, God has declared us as enough to be God's beloved. Regardless of how we might think we fit in or don't, God has welcomed us into God's flock with Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Regardless of how we see ourselves compared to our peers, our colleagues, or even our enemies and frenemies, we completely, wholly, and unequivocally belong.

Today, aside from it being the 4th Sunday of Easter, it is also Good Shepherd Sunday as well as our church's Vocational Sunday. And so I encourage every single one of you that if you've ever even had a whiff of a call to serve in ministry, talk to your pastor or deacon about it. If you don't have a pastor or deacon, then talk to a trusted friend or loved one about it. If you don't have a trusted friend or loved one, then ok, you can contact me and we talk about it. But let me assure you, if a dumb, goofy, materialistic teenager like me can find a way to belong in the church as a pastor, then I am certain that you can too.

And so as we continue in this season of Easter, as we continue to look at the empty cross and be reminded of a resurrected Christ, may we take the call that Jesus has for our lives to be part of his flock, that we might follow the leading, guiding, and caring of our good and gracious Shepherd that knows us and loves us. Thanks be to God. *Amen*.

[Hymn](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=il1OeQfkVyl) – The King of Love My Shepherd Is - www.youtube.com/watch?v=il1OeQfkVyl

Prayers

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

Loving Shepherd, you know your own and your own know you. Your voice calls us to your loving embrace. Strengthen your church throughout the world that we bear witness to your expansive love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Gracious Shepherd, you are generous with the gifts of goodness and mercy. Restore your creation to wholeness so that cities and towns, countryside and wilderness, may abound with life. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Hope-giving Shepherd, the nations and peoples are your heritage. Place into the hearts of all leaders and rulers the passion to serve. Crucify any desire to overpower others and give leaders joy in lifting up the lowly. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Abiding Shepherd, your love flows as we reach out to those around us. Move us with your Spirit, so that we lay down our lives for those in need. Help us love one another in truth and action. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Saving Shepherd, you restore us to wholeness. Help our community in our life together and give us vigor as people of faith. In the midst of challenges and opportunities, fill us anew with your Holy Spirit. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Eternal Shepherd, you hold us securely in your loving hands. In the assurance of resurrection hope, we remember our loved ones who have died in you. Bring us, with them, to dwell in your house forever. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In the hope of new life in Christ, O Lord, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn – Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us -
www.youtube.com/watch?v=DrxxmObv2-s