



First United Methodist Church of Moweaqua

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Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors. The People of the First United Methodist Church.

Self - Guided worship For April 25, 2021- Third Easter

You may go at your own pace. Some ideas for centering yourself for worship: Set a particular time and a particular place. Light a candle as you begin and extinguish it as you end. Set aside a place in your home that is quiet, perhaps even a space where that is the only thing that will happen in that space- a spot in a spare bedroom, a corner of the living room, or a place that can be changed and used at the time. Turn off distractions like the TV or the computer. Take some deep centering breaths as you begin. Take your time and be present to the Holy Spirit at work in you.

Opening Sentences

Let me worship God who is my shepherd. It is God who restores my life. Surely God's mercy and goodness surround me; and I dwell in God's house for ever.

Psalm Reading

Psalm 23

Prayer of Confession

Almighty God, whose blessed son Jesus has revealed himself to be the good shepherd: Grant that when I hear his voice I may know him to be the one who calls me by name that I may follow where he leads. Forgive me when I stray and do not follow the voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Have mercy on me O God and lead me back in to your fold. Hear me as I seek to love in deeds as well as words, for I pray in the name of Christ the Lord.

Time of Silent Prayer

Assurance of Forgiveness

Accept the good news, Christ died for me while I was yet a sinner; that proves God's love toward me. In the name of Jesus Christ, I have been forgiven. Glory to God. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Lord, open my heart and mind by the power of your Holy Spirit, that as I read the scriptures I may hear with joy what you say to me today. Amen.

First Lesson: 1 John 3:16-24

Second Lesson: John 10:11-18

Meditation on the Scripture: See meditation page

Offering (You may wish to place your offering in a prominent place at this time as a symbol of bringing it before God and then mail it later)

Offertory Prayer:

Most gracious and loving God, you give me all good things. You sent me your son that I might know of your great love for me. May I give to you as generously as you have given to me. Bless my offering today as I come before you. Magnify my efforts that through what I offer, your name may be glorified and those in need may hear your words, and see your face. I pray today in the name of your son Jesus the risen Christ. Amen.

Prayer for Joys and Concerns:

Most Powerful God, May the words I bring this day be of praise and adoration. Even though things may be different help me to remember you are the same forever and always. I continue to lift in prayer those who are ill and suffering, those who I name before you and know personally and those who only you know to need healing. I lift to you those whose hearts are breaking this day because they have lost loved ones to death. Give them comfort in the words and actions I share. Continue to give me a sense of wisdom and calm as I keep my community of church and school and work connected. Bless those who I name before you _____. I give thanks for the joys that I have encountered this week. The joy of celebrating birthdays for_____ and anniversaries for_____. The simple joy of knowing I live in a community that cares for me. As I go into this week give me the strength and courage to face unafraid each day knowing you are beside me. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.

Benediction:

Christ the Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! Believe and Go in the name of the risen Christ!

Scriptures:

Psalm 23 Common English Bible (CEB)

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing.
- 2 He lets me rest in grassy meadows; he leads me to restful waters;
- 3 he keeps me alive. He guides me in proper paths for the sake of his good name.
- 4 Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger because you are with me. Your rod and your staff— they protect me.
- 5 You set a table for me right in front of my enemies. You bathe my head in oil; my cup is so full it spills over!
- 6 Yes, goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the Lord's house as long as I live.

1 John 3:16-24 Common English Bible (CEB)

- 16 This is how we know love: Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. 17 But if someone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but refuses to help—how can the love of God dwell in a person like that?
- 18 Little children, let's not love with words or speech but with action and truth. 19 This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts in God's presence. 20 Even if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. 21 Dear friends, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence in relationship to God. 22 We receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. 23 This is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love each other as he commanded us. 24 Those who keep his commandments dwell in God and God dwells in them. This is how we know that he dwells in us, because of the Spirit he has given us.

John 10:11-18 Common English Bible (CEB)

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 When the hired hand sees the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away. That's because he isn't the shepherd; the sheep aren't really his. So the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. 13 He's only a hired hand and the sheep don't matter to him.

14 "I am the good shepherd. I know my own sheep and they know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. I give up my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that don't belong to this sheep pen. I must lead them too. They will listen to my voice and there will be one flock, with one shepherd.

17 "This is why the Father loves me: I give up my life so that I can take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I give it up because I want to. I have the right to give it up, and I have the right to take it up again. I received this commandment from my Father."

Meditation:

Recently this story appeared in the news cycle: A sheep in Melbourne Australia recently received a much-needed shearing after rescuers found the abandoned animal with more than 75 pounds of wool weighing it down. Not surprisingly, the before and after video of the celebrity sheep received more than 18 million views online.

Despite the heavy fleece, the animal was actually underweight after being sheared. As any good shepherd would be, one rescuer was delighted with the outcome saying, "He is doing so well today, surprising us and becoming more trusting too. We truly believe that he understands what we have done for him has eased his burden and changed him for the better."

Few things are more dependent than sheep. We may like to think of ourselves as being as clever as a fox, as strong as a horse or as wise as an owl, but it is very humbling to think of ourselves as sheep. Sheep are helpless creatures in desperate need of a shepherd.

Jesus calls his church a flock of sheep, of which he is the good shepherd. At the same time Jesus is also the "Lamb of God." He goes, says the prophet Isaiah, "like a lamb to the slaughter." Jesus as a Shepherd is not an autonomous individual. He derives the strength to be a shepherd from His own absolute dependence upon God -- the Source and End of all that is and all that will be. He loses His life in total commitment to the God's Will and thus Jesus discovers the life that makes him "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." His commitment is not a matter of coercion but of freely willed obedience: "I lay down My life to take it up again. No one takes it from Me; I lay it down freely" (Jn.10:17,18). And all this in response to "the command I received from My Father" (Jn.10:18). His is not the false freedom of selfish independence; His is genuine freedom born of radical dependence.

If you ever get to travel to Israel among the things you will encounter on a visit to the Holy Land are shepherds. Most of us have never even seen a shepherd. And, for this reason, you may not be able to appreciate the constant references to shepherds and their flocks in the Bible. But if you visit the Holy Land you can observe, firsthand, two contrasting roles of the shepherd that may help you understand this "Grace of God" in a whole new way.

First, with gentle handling, the shepherd calms those sheep who are hurting, those who are in special need, those who are lost. And one of the beautiful things about God is how we are calmed when we are hurting. We all can experience that and be grateful for it. It may be a physical illness, or a problem with a child or a problem of communication between spouses, or a problem on the job. It may be the tragic loss of someone we love dearly. It may be a concern for the deep social problems that exist in our country or around the world. We feel all of this. But one of the beautiful things we can come to realize and understand is that God is never closer to us -- God is never loving us more -- than when we are hurting if only we will let God be present to us in this way.

Second, the shepherd rebukes the sheep who are disobedient. If you ever observe a shepherd at work, you are likely to see him occasionally put his crook around a wayward lamb's neck and guide it gently but firmly back into line. And seeing this happen can help you to understand why the Biblical

writers used the shepherd and sheep imagery so very often, as a teaching device. The sacred authors understood that judgment is a very real part of God's Being; that judgment is part of God's Grace, part of God's goodness. Judgment is the way God brings us back from the edge of disaster and back into the fold of the good life.

There was an old pastor of a little rural Church who had developed a great reputation for preaching. His preaching was effective. It was memorable. It was even life-changing for some. When asked the secret of his power, he would say, "I don't rightly know. But I tell them what I'm going to tell them; then I tell them; then I tell them what I just told them."

From cover to cover the "goodness of God" is a constant Biblical theme. It is as though the sacred authors were constantly saying to themselves, "I'll tell them what I'm going to tell them; then I'll tell them; then I'll tell them what I just told them."

And so, we come to celebrate, and we come to praise, and we come to give thanks, and we come to worship. Why? Because "Our God is good."

The Gospel of John celebrates the way in which God's presence in Jesus Christ makes it possible for us to move from "just existing" into abundance of life. In Biblical terms, abundant life means "eternal" life.

The dominant theme in the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, and Luke is that Christ's coming makes it possible for us to enter the Kingdom of God (that is to come under the Rule of God.) But, in John's Gospel, the kingdom of God is mentioned only one or two times. Instead, John speaks of eternal life. It is John's way of describing the reality of the Kingdom of God. John is talking about fullness of life, wholeness of life, or "abundance" of life (the word Jesus Himself used).

Throughout John's Gospel, different figures are used to describe the way in which Jesus comes to offer us eternal life. He is the Bread of Life. He is the Light of the World. He is the Resurrection and the Life. He is the Way and the Truth. He is the Beloved Son of God who guides us and protects us. And in today's Gospel Lesson, He is the good Shepherd.

"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd is the one who lays down His life for the sheep," Jesus says (Jn. 10:11). Jesus lays down His life in order that we may "have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10).

The Good Shepherd has come to lead us out of bondage. The Good Shepherd has come to liberate us from the drudgery of "just existing" by offering us new life, "in Spirit and in Truth."

"I am the Good Shepherd ... and I lay down life for the sheep." By giving us His life, by sharing His life with us, He makes our life. And like that old preacher, now I am going to tell you something: By giving our life to others, by sharing our life with others, we do the same.