

Come, Lord Jesus – open our minds to understand your Word to us. Amen.

Our theme this Easter season is living the resurrection life – we are already people of the resurrection, even before we die. So how do we live as resurrection people? It means we live as ones who already know the end of the story – and that it is good. It means we have already begun to live our "eternal life," and we bring all that goodness that one day will be "all in all" into the present. Today we have a more specific question: how do we live as resurrection shepherds?

Every fourth Sunday of Easter we look at a third of Jesus' talk about being the Good Shepherd. It's not all easy to grasp – because Jesus is talking in metaphor. Jesus is talking in code, with gates and folds and predators and hired hands. The hired hands, who can't be trusted, are the religious leaders of his day – the clergy. "Laying down his life for the sheep" refers to his approaching death – and its outcome. He speaks of "other sheep in other sheepfolds" – is he hinting that his mission does go beyond his own Jewish community? Even the "I am," which in Greek has an extra "I" in it, evokes the name God told Moses, "I am that I am." This was sure to offend some and thrill others.

Jesus was never shy of offending people, especially the powerful. But that too is an attribute of a good shepherd – sheep don't need polite. Sheep need shepherds who will guide them to green grass and clean water; who will protect them from predators and keep them out of danger; who will lead them home at the end of the day and back out the next morning; who know them, and call them each by name – and yes, who will sacrifice for their wellbeing when it's necessary.

These are also the traits of a good shepherd.

The shepherd needs to have the sheep's best interest at heart – not only out of benevolence, but also because the shepherd is invested in the sheep. In Jesus' time, shepherds had to pay for any sheep they lost. The shepherd needs to know where good pasture is, where clean water is found. So she can lead the flock there. But leading a flock isn't so easy – the shepherd has to know how to keep them together, and keep them moving toward that preferred good pasture. Sheep are likely to wander off grazing anywhere they see grass, unaware that they have left the flock.

Grazing alone is dangerous for sheep – they can be eaten, or snatched, or fall. Grazing alone is dangerous for people, too – we all know people who used to be connected to community, even faith communities like this, who are at loose ends. Is there anyone we need to nudge into safe pasture? Invite into our sheep fold? That requires relationship. That requires community. This garden we’re launching today – that is an invitation to community to those who are hungry; it is a commitment to feed and tend sheep we don’t know yet.

To move the sheep together, the shepherd has to be known to the sheep, and the sheep have to trust the shepherd.

And the shepherd has to be willing to take risks on behalf of the flock.

Jesus said the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

For him, that meant literally dying on behalf of his flock, so that we might be free.

For us it may mean dying to our convenience or laying down our prerogatives, laying aside our privilege, so others can thrive.

And Jesus works through us as shepherd leaders to help others move toward the good pasture, the clear water of life.

We are Jesus’ sheep dogs, nudging people toward that life that will help them thrive; that life in which they know they are loved without condition, in which they can become the fullest expression of who they’re meant to be.

That doesn’t mean we’re always comforting – often it requires challenging.

Sheep dogs are not all cuddly with the sheep – they move them along.

Years ago I saw a funny You Tube video called “[Extreme Shepherding.](#)”

A bunch of guys in Wales got their sheep dogs to wrangle the sheep into funny patterns on a hill side, and then they video-tape it. After they do some in the daytime, they set up a night-time shoot, and strap LED lights on the sheep.

Then they send them lit up out to the hillside, and play the *1812 Overture*.

And just when the “cannons” are going off in the music, they, send the sheep dogs into the groups of sheep, scattering them – and it looks like fireworks.¹

Why am I telling you this? It’s not a bad description of our life as resurrection shepherds – carrying the light of Christ, gathering together, and then allowing ourselves to be scattered to break up the darkness.

We can be fireworks for the world, led by the One True Shepherd. *Amen.*

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qniwl2hNhDs>

John 10:11-18

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away – and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. **I know my own and my own know me**, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. **And I lay down my life for the sheep.**

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. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."