

Jesus, let Your voice only be heard, for your sheep know your voice. Amen.

This gospel passage reminds me of a scene from a Monty Python film, *Life of Brian*, which tells the Jesus story from a bit of an angle... It's the Sermon on the Mount and there's quite a crowd, and those on the outer edges can't hear very well; as people repeat Brian's words for others, they get a bit mangled. "I think he said, 'Blessed are the cheesemakers.'" John's Gospel, written at a thirty or forty-year remove from the events of Jesus' life sometimes has that quality of the game "Telephone." Because Jesus's words aren't this confusing in the other Gospels. Gates, gate-keepers, shepherds, thieves, hired men... what is he talking about? *Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.* So I guess we shouldn't feel so bad.

What does come through loud and clear is the promise of abundant life. Safety, sustenance, life all flow from this relationship with the good shepherd, in and out of the fold. In the fold there is rest and security – but the food is out, not in. The food is in the green pastures to which God leads us; at the tables he sets for us in the presence of our enemies. That is our calling as sheep of Christ's fold, not to seek to be fed in our buildings, But to find and make feasts in the pastures, and invite others to join us. This present crisis gives us a chance to lean into this calling.

One of the many dreams I've had for us this year is to launch a program called "Eating with Strangers." There are similar projects all over the country, all seeking to address the terrible division and divisiveness, the politicization and polarization that are holding us back as a nation. We were too busy with other start-ups, and now who knows when people will be able to come together around a shared meal, but the concept is simple: We would publicize this widely, inviting people to come share a meal at Christ Church, with the understanding they would be breaking bread with people they didn't know and might not agree with on many issues. We wouldn't discuss issues, but intentionally set about recovering the facility to speak and listen with respect and civility, and be open to one another's stories. All while sharing a wonderful, nurturing meal, beautifully served – no paper plates.

That's how things started out in the original church in Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection – the Book of Acts gives us a picture, perhaps idealized, but compelling: *All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.*

There wasn't such a strong sense of yours or mine, as much as "ours."

We're going to need to cultivate that, if we hope to address the deep needs that are already arising in the wake of this pandemic, needs both local and global.

*Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple,
they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts...*

Because we have to, we are breaking bread in our homes. We're living this.

Spending much time together at the temple was never very realistic for us, with our crazy busy lives – but now there is a core group that meets every weekday evening to check in and say Night Prayers together – and I hope you'll join us. There's an almost infinite room for more.

And some of you have invited your brothers or sisters, or neighbors to join –

And if we all keep doing that, friends lo and behold,

... day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

This portrayal of the first church is a picture of *koinonia*, a word I used last week. *Koinonia* describes a fellowship of mutuality and interdependence.

Mutual sharing and caring is a hallmark of *koinonia*, of Christian community.

It goes with abundance. There are different kinds of abundance –

there is personal abundance, inherited abundance, national abundance...

I live in abundance because I work and earn a good salary; because my family had the means to give me a great education; because the color of my skin and that education gives me access to resources and networks of privilege.

I have an abundance of food, clothing, money, technology, recreation.

But when I first went to seminary, I wasn't so flush, and didn't know how I'd pay for a Yale education. The rector of my church said he'd set up a fund and allow people to make donations through the church, and I sent out a letter.

I expected a few hundred, maybe a thousand... then I passed the first thousand and thought, "How generous." And it kept coming. Then I received \$5,000

from one person, and I thought, "This is crazy." And it kept coming. \$22,000 in all. That's *koinonia* in action – and it flowed from the fellowship we'd shared, much of which I had fostered over 22 years in that church. I never thought about that 22...

Koinonia abundance is shared and sharing. It's not what the church has in the bank; it's what we have to share with each other and with the world. It can co-exist with hardship. One of our members is undergoing chemotherapy. Frequently these days she goes to her mailbox to find yet another hat to cover her cold head that another person in our community has crocheted her. She now has an abundance of hats, even while she endures this hard time. The trick is to notice where needs are and meet them –
and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need
Abundance is to be the Number 1 marker of life in Christian community. Where do you see abundance in your life, or in our communities? ...
Where do you see need?

The life of abundance isn't only about feeding and giving to the poor. It's about sharing our deepest gift, inviting people into a living relationship with Jesus in which lives are changed, and they learn to hear the voice of the Shepherd for themselves. We are both sheep and shepherd, under the Good Shepherd. Ultimately, our flocks will thrive as we live into our role as shepherds, finding people in the pasture and helping create feasts.

Jesus said the Shepherd *...calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.* Jesus is calling us by name – and he is leading us out. Out of stuckness. Out of our past, out of ways of being that no longer lead to life. He is leading us out because that is where the lost sheep are to be found. There's a role for the sheepfold – for us to come together, to connect, recharge, share heartaches and celebrations – but the action is in the pasture, the world. *[They] will come in and go out and find pasture, that's what Jesus said.* That's the rhythm of our life as followers of Jesus –
He brings us in, and then He leads us out, and after the day – or week – we come back in to be fed and refreshed, and then out we go again.

What Jesus promised us was life, and abundant, overflowing life. Not abundance of possessions, not abundance of time, not abundance of ease. Abundance of life. Life is what we're here for, my friends. Life is what we offer those who are only half-living.
More life, more engagement, more joy, more peace, more love.
More meaning, more purpose to your life.
That's what we offer in the name of Christ.
That is what Christ offers to us: life in abundance. *Amen.*

John 10:1-14

Jesus said, “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. **The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.** The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. **He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.** When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

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

Acts 2:42-47

Those who had been baptized devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.