

Season of Plenty: Shepherding

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – September 29 2024

19th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Ezekiel 34:11-16,23-24; Psalm 23; Matthew 18:10-14 NRSVue

Reflection: Psalm 28

Greeting: Bless the Lord because he has listened to my request for mercy! The Lord is my strength and my shield. My heart trusts him. I was helped, my heart rejoiced, and I thank him with my song. The Lord is his people's strength; he is a fortress of protection for his anointed one. Save your people, God! Bless your possession! Shepherd them and carry them for all time! (Psalm 28)

Prayer: God, our guide and our guardian, we seek you together in peace and gratitude. Help us this day as we join together to sing your praises and glorify your name. Help us to remember the generosity you have shown us as we remember your care like a shepherd for his flock. We are thankful that you bless us by your grace that we may know your steadfast love and faithfulness are with us all the days of our lives. Watch over us, Heavenly Father, that we may know your gentle hand. Guide us by your Holy Spirit that we may know the direction you need us to go. And let us walk in the footsteps of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, that we may follow in truth and light. May we share in the plenty that we find when we put our trust in your word and your way. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 28

¹ To you, O Lord, I call; my rock, do not refuse to hear me, for if you are silent to me, I shall be like those who go down to the Pit. ² Hear the voice of my supplication, as I cry to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary. ⁶ Blessed be the Lord, for he has heard the sound of my pleadings. ⁷ The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts; so I am helped, and my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him. ⁸ The Lord is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed. ⁹ O save your people and bless your heritage; be their shepherd and carry them forever. (Psalm 28:1-2,6-9 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Psalm 28, and we hear of God hearing our prayers. That the Lord will be our strength and our shield. That God will watch over us like a shepherd and guard us always. That we have a home with our Savior. How do you give thanks for the ways in which you have been blessed? Who can you lift up in your prayers this week? Who can you share your blessings with? What are some ways that you can give thanks with others for the blessings we find in God's grace? How will you reflect the love of Christ in this season of plenty?

Prayer: O Lord, we thank you for listening to the voice of your people. No matter what we face we know that we never face it alone because you are with us. We thank you that your peace is ever before us. We come to you as sheep of your flock, knowing that you provide for us with your steadfast love and faithfulness. We seek you out in our prayers this day, lifting up the causes that we have to rejoice. We turn to you with the difficulties that we face in our daily lives. We lift up all that we have spoken together, bringing all that we have before you. We also turn to you with the silent pleadings of our hearts, both the quiet praises that we lift up and the silent struggles we hold within. Though they go unspoken, we know that they never go unheard. We bring you our joys and our concerns, our happiness and our sorrow, our mourning and our gladness, knowing that you are there for us in all things. Help us to celebrate that you are with us with the plenty we find in your abounding love and care. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible Updated Edition. Our first reading is from Ezekiel chapter 34, verse 11 through 16 and 23 through 24.

¹¹For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep and will sort them out. ¹²As shepherds sort out their flocks when they are among scattered sheep, so I will sort out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them into their own land, and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. ¹⁴I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. ¹⁶I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strays, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice. ²³I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them; he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I the Lord have spoken. (Ezekiel 34:11-16,23-24 NRSVue)*

Our next reading is from Psalm 23.

¹The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; ³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. ⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. ⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶Surely 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. (Psalm 23 NRSVue)*

Our final reading is from Matthew chapter 18, verse 10 through 14.

¹⁰ "Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven. ¹² What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. ¹⁴ So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost. (Matthew 18:10-14 NRSVue*)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week, we look at shepherding, and we look at it not just as God's protection for us, but the example Christ sets for how we treat each other. That God provides out of his plenty that we can be taken care of. But because of that, we are called to take care of each other. And I want to start with our gospel reading, and we will circle all the way back around to it. But in our gospel reading, we hear Jesus talking about the way that God cares for us. That when just one sheep goes astray, the shepherd will go to find that one and bring them back into the fold, because God cares for the individual. There is the idea here that when one person is lost, they are worth bringing back. They are worth going out of the way to go and find them. And Jesus makes it clear that this is also how we are called to treat each other. That it's not just that we should marvel at God's care for us, but that it is the example being set for how we should treat each other. Now you may have noticed I used two Old Testament readings as our other readings for today. It's because they really do highlight the ways that we think of shepherding in relationship to how we are to treat each other and the sanctuary that we find in the plenty that God provides.

One of those is the protection that God gives us. That God is seen as our shepherd in Ezekiel, and that even though the flocks are scattered, God will bring them together. And it is a discourse on the way that God is going to gather his people together and God will watch over them. That God himself will shepherd the sheep, that he will bring them to safety, that he will find the lost and bring them back. That he will heal the injured, that he will strengthen those who are weak, that he will feed them with justice. And much like other reversal of fortunes that we get in the Bible, the weak are strengthened but the fat and the strong are not. The reason is that they got that way by ignoring those around them. They got that way by taking advantage of those around them. They are meant to represent the excesses of those who don't care about the people around them. And then we hear this line that God will set up one shepherd over his people, his servant David. And of course we can read that as Christ. The line of David, the good shepherd who watches over the sheep, who cares for the flock. And it's this idea that God truly and genuinely loves us, cares for us, and wants us to succeed. That he would put Christ over us so that we could be nourished, that we could be saved. And it's setting an example for us of how we care for each other.

And we hear this most famously in Psalm 23. We hear of the kind of trust that we have with God. And when we think about this in our frame of reference of Christ as the shepherd, it's this idea that all our needs are fulfilled in him and that we have no worries. In this poetry, we

are given a vision of lying down in green pastures where there is plenty to eat. We hear of being beside waters that are still, calm, and relaxing. That the path before us is clear. That even when we are faced with difficult times, we have nothing to fear because the shepherd is with us. We find comfort in the presence of the Lord. And there's a shift in Psalm 23 that moves away from being the sheep of a flock to being people being served at a dinner. A table is prepared and we are anointed. Our cup overflows with goodness, and we are secure because we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

I said I would circle back around to our gospel reading because these are the ideas of a shepherd that Christ is referring to when he talks about a shepherd going to find the one stray sheep. That God rejoices over each person who is saved and that we should rejoice. But I really wanted to touch on this idea of this being the example for us. And I wanted to touch on that because often when we have this picture of a good shepherd, of what it means to seek out the lost, to help the weak, and to give comfort to the afflicted. It almost becomes this very difficult to capture idea of something so good that it's hard to imagine. But I think it's a comfort that we can find in the here and now and a comfort we should be providing for each other. I say this because we are called to do all of those things. One of the easy ways that we can think about it is in the reference Jesus makes to these little ones. Because we can think of parenting like being a shepherd. We try to keep them safe, try to keep them free from harm, try to reduce the stresses in a child's life. We try to teach them what is right and what is wrong. We teach them rules, not to control them, but to give them safety, to give them structure, to give them understanding. We do it to help. And much like we see the good shepherd going after one lost sheep, we help out children whenever they need it, wherever they are, with whatever help they need. We comfort them, we guide them, we love them.

I bring this up because this is how we are called to treat each other. We are called to help one another in the same way. We may not all be called to leadership, but our shepherding doesn't always have to come from being a leader. We can provide many of those same things when we come together as a congregation. Because we can provide peace of mind for each other. We can help each other to overcome difficulties, because we can strengthen each other in Christ. Because when we are there for each other in the name of Christ, we strengthen each other in the name of Christ, and we help each other in the name of Christ. We build each other up so that we can make it through those dark times, knowing that we have no evil to fear when we are together in Christ. We can provide for each other, and we can comfort each other so that we can be free of anxiety, so that we too can help each other to feel that we are in green pastures by still water. Because we help each other find peace of mind when we share together in our journey in Christ. Because the example that Christ sets for us is being someone who cares deeply for the people around them. That we should care about how our words make other people feel. That we care about how we may hurt one another with the things that we say and do. That we respect each other enough that we care about what happens to the people

around us. That we care about our community. That we care about the people in it, and that when we can, we act as the shepherd for others.

Because while we never have to shepherd Christ, we do need to support each other. It means seeking out anyone who's gone astray, in whatever ways they stray. It means helping each other with whatever needs we may have, in whatever struggles we may face. Because the example that God gives us is that we should always be willing to do what we can to protect each other, to build each other up, to give each other safety, to help each other find security, to assist one another in finding peace of mind, and in helping each other to grow, to learn, and to love. Not tripping each other up, but all working together to build a brighter tomorrow. That we may know we are in the house of the Lord forever. That our shepherd guides us and leads us, that we may be united as one flock, helping each other to know peace, and to know love. And that we are given the strength to share in that love, in all that we are, and in all that we do. We share as one flock in the plenty that our shepherd provides. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Season of Plenty

This series is a reflection on the work we are called to do as the body of Christ. In it, we explore how we invite others to the table and how we share in what we have. God's love as our shepherd acts as an example that we can follow. We are called to share in the harvest as we care for others and act with the Holy Spirit. In this season of plenty, how will you share the peace of Christ with others?

9/22: Harvesting
10/13: Sharing

9/29: Shepherding
10/20: Timing

10/6: Inviting

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752 Walnut
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Toledo UMC

Madison & Ohio St
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Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC

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Worship 9:30am

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