

⊗ Will's Sermon
Sunday, April 13, 2008
Fourth Sunday of Easter

Lectionary Readings: First Reading: Acts 2: 42-47; Psalm 23; Second Reading 1 Peter 2: 19-25; Gospel: John 10: 1-10

This Sunday is called Shepherd Sunday for our Gospel message. We have many different figures of speech – light from darkness, death to new life, lost to found, sin or separation from love toward forgiveness and reconciliation, the new relationship with compassion and justice. Today the figure of speech has to do with sheep and shepherds. We don't come across sheep or shepherds in our world today. Back in the day the sheep industry was one of the most important economic indicators. Sheep provided big income. Many sheep meant great wealth. Keep in mind the shepherd didn't own the sheep; the shepherd worked for the owner. The relationships between owner and shepherd and between sheep and shepherd were not at all romantic. Just business. A shepherd cared about the sheep as the cashier protects the cash drawer. Short the drawer money, short a few sheep and you are gone. So in our stories we can already see something a bit shocking. We hear about a shepherd who actually cares. We hear about sheep that recognize the voice of the shepherd. Never had that world (back then) heard of such a thing.

We all know about this famous figure of speech: The Living Presence of God, the presence of compassion and justice leads us. Our ears tune into the reality of injustice and apathy and we can hear the reality of justice and compassion. We are not a dumb bunch of sheep. We're savvy about the way things are. Following our shepherd is simple but not easy. It's universal to know when we experience injustice. But we have to *learn* how to hear and see the injustice suffered by others. We proclaim a way of life that provides liberty and justice for all. We proclaim a way of life of compassion and mercy, justice and forgiveness, and we do our best to live into this way. And there are very real powers and principalities against all we stand for. We have slipped away from "by the people and for the people". The people are not active which allows powers and principalities to exist more for themselves.

Our leader, our shepherd set his face toward Jerusalem, knowing full well the cost. As we follow Jesus we too will have to manage our own struggles with compassion versus power, our own struggles with cherishes notions and justice. As followers of Jesus, ours is not an easy way.

We cannot do as the disciples did back in the day. We cannot sell all we have and give possessions to those in need. (Communes worked for a while – as long as there was plenty of dope around.) Yet all of us do all we can to help the needy. Our ministry to others is not romantic. Our ministry is thoughtful. We want to help. We want others to have an abundant life.

On this Shepherd Sunday we will see the picture of Jesus with the lamb over his shoulder. And a beautiful picture it is indeed. And, we will also see volunteers helping at Loaves and Fishes. We will see people here bringing food items to share.

So many of you are thoughtfully involved in ministries to others. All of us continue to practice engage Christianity.

The last line from today's Gospel has always meant a lot to me – "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." I have never understood abundant life – to be happy and joyous with lots of toys. Rather abundant life happens when we are sitting at the house, about 9 pm and our hearts and minds are comfortable with each other. After all is said and done we can look back over the day and the crazy things, as well as the actions and decisions that have added just a bit of peace to this mean old world. This is what abundant life feels like.

Here at Saint Andrew's we know it well. After each day we take our spiritual inventory. We clearly see things done and left undone, yet we also see all those times we lived into our calling as the body of Christ, the living presence of compassion and justice.

Abundant life is not perfect life. Abundant life is moving into the mess without an answer. Abundant life is moving into reality knowing that the living presence of God is already there for us to follow. We may be like Peter and deny the presence of the living God, yet we soon suffer enough denial that we can see what is real – that we are moving toward abundant life, moving toward compassion and mercy.

⊠ Amen