

Straight from the "Hart"

September 4, 2022



Sharing the journey
to know, love, and serve God.

Welcome

- * Good morning, welcome to the Hartland UMC service script. We are glad you are reading...
- * We've talked about Jesus as the **bread** of the world – the staple ingredient to full life and eternal life; and as the **light of the world**, discovering ever deepening insights into who Jesus is and following his will for our life. And today, Jesus says "I am the gate" and the model, the example, the noble, the good shepherd who guides us to lush pastures -- to a full life.

Apostle's Creed

Opening Prayer God of provision, we praise you with joy, for your grace brings us to full life. You sustain us through days of darkness as well as days bright with your light. This is why we offer resources and ourselves to you, for under your compassionate care, we are blessed and we gather to honor you through our humble worship. Amen. Please remain standing for the Call to Worship and first song...

Inspired from Richard Eslinger © 2006 Upper Room Books
in Worship & Song, Leader's Edition

Call to Worship

Lay Reader: Come, learn to rely on the Lord's leadership. Come, not to focus on ourselves and what we can get from others, but to seek his guidance and trust in his gifts -- and to follow the example he set when he loved us so much that he gave himself to the cross -- so that we could be made right with God and alive in all that we do.

Inspired from © 2008 Ray C. Jordan
in Worship & Song, Leader's Edition



Music Today, Jesus says, "I am the Good Shepherd." One of the most popular descriptions of the Lord as Shepherd comes from Psalm 23. Let's sing this musical version of the Psalm to the tune of Amazing Grace.

The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want (to tune of Amazing Grace)

1 The Lord's my shepherd; I'll not want. He makes me down to lie
in pastures green; he leadeth me the quiet waters by.

2 My soul he doth restore again, and me to walk doth make
within the paths of righteousness, e'en for his own name's sake.

3 Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale, yet will I fear no ill;
for thou art with me, and thy rod and staff me comfort still.

4 My table thou hast furnished in presence of my foes;
My head thou dost with oil anoint, and my cup overflows.

5 Goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me,
and in God's house forevermore my dwelling place shall be.

Theme There is an old saying – the grass is always greener at the sod farm. 😊 No, that's not it – The grass is always greener ...? on the other side... I've found that true – over the years of many different parsonage lawns, I've noticed that even my own yard looks nice and green – from a distance – but then you get up close and maybe not so much. In fact, with some yards, people would come up and say “Hey, let's get all the weeds killed,” and I replied, “If you kill the weeds there won't be any green left in the yard!” But I digress. The point is we don't always realize how good we have it – or – even more – because we only see “from a distance”, we tend to think others have it so much better than ourselves. But everyone's life is full of a wide variety of experiences. Sometimes it is like an exciting mountaintop experience, sometimes it is like peaceful green pastures, and sometimes it is challenging like a dark, scary valleys. Like the grass from a distance, sometimes we mix up which experience we are really experiencing in the moment, such as the bat in this story...

Once upon a time, there was a bat who felt it was unreasonably hard work to travel around in the middle of night to hunt for nourishment. He grumbled about it so much that all the bats in his cave knew how unhappy he was just doing what bats normally do. One night when he was out, he looked through the window of a house and saw a bird in its cage. He saw that it received food and water without having to do anything at all. He envied the bird's easy life and decided to try and become a child's pet. So the next night, he slept through the night and awoke in the morning, and went to a nearby park where children played. He hoped a nice child would adopt him as a pet.

But bats aren't especially pretty to most children (especially during the day) and none tried to catch him, and even ran away when he came close. He designed a disguise. He made a beak and glued on feathers and learned to whistle so he didn't sound as much like the screeches that bats normally make. Back at the park the next day, a very near-sighted boy who didn't wear his glasses thought he was kind of cute and tried to catch him. He was surprised at how easy it was, not knowing that it was the bat's goal all along.

Now in a warm comfortable house, the bat felt really good in his cage. But he was getting hungry. But the boy still thought he was a bird, he had supplied him with a big cup of bird seed, but bird seed wasn't exactly appetizing nor nourishing for a bat. He couldn't eat the seeds and he was becoming skin and bones... The boy did manage to notice that and in his compassionate care, he began force feeding the awful seeds to the bat with a syringe and spoon.

The bat discovered that what he envied wasn't so great after all. He finally managed to escape the cage, shed his fake beak and feathers, and returned to his cave home. He was embarrassed by his misadventure, so he never told the other bats what had happened. All they knew was that he had been gone for a while, and now that he has returned, he had a brand-new happy outlook on "batting". Rather than the grumbling they were used to, he now hunted with much happy energy; and while they didn't really miss the grumbling bat when he was gone (because of all the grumbling), they were happy to have him back as this bat that was reborn... (ad. from "Batbird" by Pedro Pablo Sacristán)

Sometimes we think life is hard and bad, when really it isn't as bad as we imagine, and what we imagine would be a great life isn't all it's cracked up to be. That is a natural part of learning about life and its ups and downs, and it is good when we can discover what comes natural to us and that that will make us happy. But the really good news is that if we are grumbly when we should be happy, or we have learned to be happy while doing routine, or even unpleasant things, Psalm 23 says that whether we are traveling up the mountain top and to green pastures, or down into the valley to green pastures, God is with us and guiding us and helping us learn. Life is filled with paths that lead to what are seasonally better pastures and that will nourish us. So whether we think things are going great or going bad, whether we are on the mountain or in the valley, be thankful that God is with us on our path of life.

Intro to Responsive Reading (L - Lay Reader, C - Congregation)

L: Sometimes people create hard times -- or take advantage of those going through difficult times -- to enrich themselves. This is what was happening in the days of Ezekiel. Through the metaphor of shepherding, Ezekiel warns leaders about their un-shepherd-like qualities – they were bad shepherds. And lest some people who took advantage of others thought they could sidestep this warning because they didn't have “official positions of leadership”, he warns them that they were bad sheep. Then finally he predicts a day when a Good Shepherd will come and show us what real leadership is about...

Responsive Reading

Bad Shepherds

L: Sorrow awaits leaders whose only concern is to protect and nourish themselves!

C: Shepherds should look after their sheep.

L: But they exploit them instead. They drink their milk, wear their wool, and butcher the best for food.

C: In apathy, they don't care for the flock.

L: They allow them to starve. They do not protect the weak. They do not tend to the sick or bandage the injured. They let them wander off. They do not bring back strays or even bother to look for the lost.

C: Instead, they lead with neglect, rule with harshness, and shepherd with cruelty.

L: With no real shepherd, the flock is scattered, becoming easy prey for any wild animal.

C: Meanwhile the leaders took care only of themselves.

L: Therefore, God will personally go out and search and find his sheep and rescue them from these leaders.

C: God will be their Guardian.

L: These self-centered leaders will not be able to help themselves to God's flock any longer. God himself will feed his flock. They will eat in the valley's grassy meadows. They will graze on high mountain pastures. They will lie down in peace in pleasant places. He will bring them safely home and do everything for them that these leaders failed to do.

C: God will seek the lost and bring back every last stray. He will bandage the wounded and strengthen the weak...

Bad Sheep

L: As for the fat and powerful in the flock, God will feed them with a healthy portion of justice, for they are not satisfied to feast in the best pastures and rich mountain lands,

C: they trample down what remains.

L: They are not satisfied to drink from clean mountain streams,

C: they muddy the water with their feet.

L: They leave nothing fit to eat or drink.

C: Why should their care-less-ness force others to eat trampled food and fouled water?

L: Not only this, they bullied, pushed, and butted with their horns; chasing the sick and hungry away until they were scattered...

C: But God will step in and rescue them. They will no longer be hunted, hassled, or abused.



The Good Shepherd

L: God will set over them one shepherd from the family of his servant King David. He will be a prince among the people. He will feed them and be a shepherd to them.

C: God will establish a covenant of peace with his people.

L: He will drive away dangerous animals. He will bless his people and they will live safely and without fear in the wildest places.

C: He will send showers of blessing. His flock and pasture will become known for its bounty and beauty.

L: Never again will they suffer from famine, sneers, or insults.

C: They will no longer be robbed nor become prey to others.

L: Then everyone will know that they are God's protected people in *his* pasture -

C: and that the Lord is their God.

Inspired by selected verses from
Ezekiel 34:1-31(NLT, VOICE, CEV)

Music Isaiah captures this close connection of the shepherd-sheep relationship when tells the nation to receive God's comfort by knowing that he is like a



shepherd feeding his flock, gathering his lambs with his arms, carrying them against his chest, gently leading... (Isaiah 40:11 (CJB)) Let's sing about the joy that comes from that kind of secure peace as we lean against his arms and hear the beat of his heart....

Leaning on the Everlasting Arms

1. What a fellowship, what a joy divine, leaning on the everlasting arms;
what a blessedness, what a peace is mine, leaning on the everlasting arms.

Refrain

Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms;
leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms.

2. O how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way, leaning on the everlasting arms;
O how bright the path grows from day to day, leaning on the everlasting arms.
(Refrain)

3. What have I to dread, what have I to fear, leaning on the everlasting arms?
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near, leaning on the everlasting arms.
(Refrain)

Pastor's Prayer Today's prayer chorus is short one line response that we will sing at various points during the prayer. Let's begin by singing "Shepherd Me". I'll do it once and then join me the next two times... Then we'll just sing it once

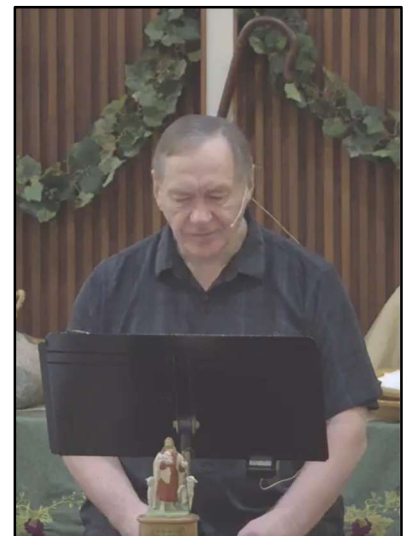
Shepherd Me, O God (3x)

♪ *Shepherd Me O God, beyond my wants,
beyond my fears, from death into life.*

God of all provision, we thank you because all that we need you have made available to us by your guidance. In our restlessness and busy-ness, we tend to wander away, yet you call us back and make us rest in your abundant life and in your peace.

♪ *Shepherd Me O God, beyond my wants,
beyond my fears, from death into life.*

You bind our hurts and encourage our hearts so that we can stand another day. You lead us forward into your good ways. Then as we follow, may your name, your reputation, be honored by our living.



I am the Good Shepherd says Jesus – Note the ceramic Jesus with sheep in front of the pastor, and the shepherd staff behind him on the altar wall...

♪ *Shepherd Me O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life.*

Sometimes the paths to rich pastures venture through troubled times, sometimes by our own doing, or the doings of others, or sometimes it is just a part of life. But we are thankful that we can feel your love, your tools that keep on course and protect us in the midst of dark times.

♪ *Shepherd Me O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life.*

Be with us and those we have named today, even if it be only in our hearts.

Specifically, today, * Ann Martin gives thanks for all the cards and well wishes, * Laura Walker gives thanks for the prayers and reports good test results, * we are thankful that Mike Kenel does not need open heart surgery after all, * Gar and Vivian Lemon thank everyone for their prayers, and we pray for the family and friends of Dennis Garland Lemon, who passed away yesterday morning and is with the Lord, * and for Jeff Gordonier's cousin Bob who lost his daughter in an accident. * We pray for Cheri Holt's aunt Helen with health problems, and we continue to pray for her neighbor who is recovering from surgery, as well as *Makayla a 16 yr old with cancer, * for someone's friend with pain and stomach problems, * for some under the weather, * for Fran Wathman, * and there are some unspoken requests as well...We'll pause for a moment and let each of us silently lift up those that are on our hearts and minds. [Time of silence] Now help us to sense your loving provision in the midst of challenges and the hatred that fills so much of our world. Refresh us and anoint us again with your power and love that so overwhelms us so much that we cannot contain it all. We are confident of your goodness. Your kindness sur-rounds us, and we will joyfully dwell with you now and forevermore.

♪ *Shepherd Me O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life.*

♪ *Shepherd Me O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life.*

♪ *Shepherd Me O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life.*

CCLI # 2561297

By your Spirit you assure us you are always near as we believe in you and live as your Son taught us to pray **Lord's Prayer**

Introduction to Responsive Bible Reading (L – Lay Reader, C – Congregation)

L: Jesus sees in the prophet Ezekiel a similar state of affairs, and it inspires him to speak of shepherding again. He uses two images and focuses on the solution rather than the problem. The people didn't understand, so he explains each

image. We've arranged the writing so that the explanation immediately follows the imagery.

Responsive Bible Reading

Image 1

L: I tell you the truth. Only thieves, robbers, and vandals sneak in by crawling through the fence or climbing over the wall of a sheep pen rather than walking through the gate.

C: The shepherd walks openly through the entrance.

L: The guard posted there to protect the sheep opens the gate for the shepherd. Jesus explains: I tell you the truth. I am the gate for the sheep. All who approached the sheep before me came as thieves and robbers.

C: But the true sheep did not listen to any of them.

L: I am the gate. Those who come in through Me will be saved.

C: They will come and go freely and will find good pastures.

L: The thief approaches with malicious intent, his purpose is to steal, kill, and destroy.

C: My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life with joy and abundance.

Image 2

L: The sheep know their shepherd's voice.

C: He calls each of them by name and leads them out.

L: When all the sheep have been gathered, he walks ahead of them,

C: and they follow him because they know his voice.

L: The sheep will not follow strangers.

C: They will run away because they do not recognize his voice.

L: Jesus explains: I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for his sheep.

C: The hired hand is not like the shepherd caring for his own sheep.

L: He doesn't own the sheep. When he sees a wolf attacking, snatching and scattering the sheep, he abandons them and runs for his life, leaving them defenseless. Then the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock.

C: The hired hand runs because he works only for wages and does not really care about the sheep.

L: I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep, and my sheep know me. Just as my Father knows me and I know the Father.

C: I will give my life for the sheep.

L: I have other sheep that are not in this sheep pen. I must also bring them together. They will listen to my voice,

C: and the flock will be united. One flock. One shepherd.

John 10:1-3a, 7-10, 3b-6, 11-14 (NLT, VOICE, CEV)

Music ... Jesus leads a united flock. Sometimes he leads to places and times that remind us of Eden like plushness, and sometimes he leads through gloomy skies and stormy seas. Either way, he is there, reaching out his hand to grasp ours and lead us through. Let's stand before the sermon, stretch and sing of our willingness to take his hand and follow him....

He Leadeth Me: O Blessed Thought

1. He leadeth me: O blessed thought! O words with heavenly comfort fraught!
Whate'er I do, where'er I be, still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.

Refrain

He leadeth me, he leadeth me, by his own hand he leadeth me;
his faithful follower I would be, for by his hand he leadeth me.

2. Sometimes mid scenes of deepest gloom,
sometimes where Eden's bowers bloom,
by waters still, o'er troubled sea, still 'tis his hand that leadeth me.
(Refrain)

3. Lord, I would place my hand in thine, nor ever murmur nor repine;
content, whatever lot I see, since 'tis my God that leadeth me.
(Refrain)

Sermon I Am... the Shepherd Gate: Bah Shepherds, Bah Sheep

If you were here or listened online last week, you'll remember that Jesus healed a blind man who came to see Jesus for who he was. John has compiled his book in a way that readers would see today's text about the gate and shepherd as a reaction to that event. At the end of that event, of the healing of the blind man, who then Jesus sought him and then comments after his trial. The Light who gave sight – and insight -- to one who could not see, also accused the Pharisees who could see as (spiritually) blind because they claimed they understood God but could not see Jesus for who he was. This solidified these religious leaders' opinion of Jesus

as a heretical sinner rather than the Messiah and Son of God. And now, as we just heard, he uses some simple images to illustrate the difference between himself as the Shepherd Gate and these “blind” religious leaders – or as the sermon plays on the words based on Ezekiel – bah – leaders. Bah as in the sound that sheep make, and bah as in bah humbug – not very good leaders -- an exclamation of something not liked.

There is a sense in which a person can be both shepherd and gate at the same time. Many sheep pens like you’ve seen on the TVs and in the front of your bulletin, just have an opening, they did not have a swinging gate that they could open and close. Once the sheep were in for the night, the shepherd would lay down across that opening – and no enemy animal can get in and no sheep could get out without crossing over and waking the shepherd and him knowing about it. So the gate was the shepherd and the shepherd was the gate.



This dual role seems to be in play in the first image, although the emphasis is on the gate. Jesus is the shepherd who enters through the gate – the opening in the wall – because he has every right to enter as the true shepherd of that flock. But he is also the gate who after leading his flock in, lays down, keeps them safely in and enemies out.

We skipped the label in the Ezekiel reading, the Lord pronounces himself against the self-centered shepherds – some translations even quote God as saying that they are his enemies. Jesus uses the word “outlaw” here (it’s been translated robber, bandit, thief, vandal), etc.. – a general word meaning “guerilla warrior” or “revolutionary bandit.” In this context, it may mean those who coerce people in or out of faith on the basis of their own traditional terms.

An even more noteworthy comparison is when Jesus calls himself the gate – for the Pharisees were the ones who considered themselves the gate (keepers) who guarded the legitimacy of the faith. They considered it their job to vet the validity of rabbis by ensuring that what they taught was in line with everything that they believed. If they taught something different, they were not considered a legitimate rabbi. They were the official gatekeepers of the faith. But Jesus is saying he is the gatekeeper, not them.

Further, this conversation is taking place at the Festival of Dedication (or Hanukkah). If you don’t know a lot about that, as their festival went to relive those

experiences, it would be on the forefront of everyone's mind -- the rampant corruption of the religious leaders in the days that led up to the days they were celebrating -- remembering. They had allowed the Greek king (back then) to use the Temple for pagan practices and as well as persecute the Jews brutally. It led to the Maccabean revolt that finally turned it all around and the corruption and the foreign influences were cleaned out. There was a miracle of oil that when it should have burned out, it didn't burn out, allowing them to properly dedicate the Temple. So there is this Festival that honors that miracle. But a major part of that story is how corrupt and complicit the leaders were with Hellenism and the Greeks rather than being true to their Jewish faith.

The people didn't understand this imagery, so Jesus explains the imagery. He sees these leaders not as gatekeepers, but as the thieves and outlaws who come to lead the sheep inappropriately, largely now complicit with Roman politics, (just as in the Maccabean days they were complicit with Greece politics and the Hellenistic culture, and as they did in the days of Ezekiel shortly before exile). They came to steal from the people, to kill (a word that literally means slaughter which has connotations of the animal sacrifices on the altar -- again linking the story to priestly corruption), and he comes to destroy (true faith) and spiritual life in the name of traditions and practices by their corruption.

By contrast, Jesus makes himself not only the shepherd who approaches, but primarily in this image, he is the gate who allows true shepherds in and out, but even more importantly, who allows the true sheep in and out. He is the gate who allows the sheep into his protection and leads them out to salvation and to pasture, to spiritual nourishment -- and to fullness of life; God sent Jesus so that all who would believe in him would not be destroyed, (by contrast the thieves came to destroy) but Jesus came not to condemn, but so that we can have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

In the second image, everyone is a shepherd. We have good shepherds and we have bad shepherds. Shepherds early on became the imagery for the priestly, prophetic, and political leaders of the nation. Joshua, in the Old Testament, was the ideal shepherd of the Old Testament (Numbers 27:16-17) who led the people to the promised land. When shepherds became corrupt, bad leaders -- they were called wicked and denounced as falling short of their calling and appointment. We heard in Ezekiel 34 that their shortcomings were so bad that it led to God himself

becoming the shepherd of his people. And now it is God who intercedes in Jesus to be the shepherd of the people in his day.

This imagery sees the current religious leaders as false shepherds and hired shepherds, while Jesus (whose name in Hebrew is Joshua, by the way) is the true shepherd, and then the two shepherd types are compared.

False shepherds are not followed because they do not know the flock and only use the flock for their own selfish purposes. When danger comes, these robbing shepherds flee, abandon the sheep to the wolves. This led Jesus to see people as sheep without a shepherd. (Mark 6:34, Matthew 9:36).

By comparison, Jesus is a noble, model, ideal – or as most versions underplay it – the good shepherd. Jesus is good because (1) he knows his sheep and calls them by name. Shepherds would often affectionately name their sheep nicknames – “funny nose” or whatever based on their features or personalities or types. And they would have affectionate names for many of their sheep. Jesus knows his sheep so well he could name them by who they were. And they knew him the same way. (2) Jesus is good because he gives the sheep what is best for them. The phrase “gathered all his sheep”, or in other versions, “led them out” – literally means “casts them out” – which reminds that our shepherd gets us where we need to be! Some sheep on some days have to be pushed or dragged out of the gate. Maybe you have a dog or cat that is like that. (And remember in Psalm 23, it says the Lord *makes* us lay down in green pastures? And I’ve read the shepherds say they have had to make sheep obey by breaking their leg so they can’t get away because they were so prone to running off getting into trouble and danger. He brings them in and drags them out if he has to – but he leads them home for rest and renewal, or out to pasture to find to find nourishment and full life. (3) And finally, Jesus is good because he will leave the safe flock to hunt for the wandering lamb (Luke 15:3ff), but mostly, Jesus is good because he is willing to lay down his life for the sheep, and in fact Jesus goes on to say that it is in the laying down of his life that others are invited into the fold. (John 10:15b-16)

On the basis of these images, it will do us well to ponder some questions about our spiritual journey...

Questions derived from the Bandits:

1) Is our spiritual life primarily for what we receive?

Ezekiel and Jesus accused the religious leaders of entering the faith only to get what they could from the gathered flock. To keep it in the metaphor of Ezekiel's sheep and shepherds, they were there for the sheep's milk, their wool, and their meat, but they didn't love and care for the sheep.

2) Closely related: Does our life add to or subtract from the life of others?

They let the starving starve, they did not tend to the sick and weak, they ruled with harshness and cruelty. They enjoyed their sense of attempting to control and force others into their personal mold. They did not bring love and care and health and healing.

From the Hired Hands:

3) Do we consume faith or do we own our faith?

The corrupt leaders not only consumed their communities, their congregations, their—whatever they were in charge of -- for their own personal enrichment and glory, they refused to take ownership of their responsibilities as well. They were consumers of faith, who only did what they did to get what they wanted. When trouble or conflict or unhappiness came, they moved on quickly and easily, because they had not really owned the faith, they had not invested themselves in it or in the people around them.

I used to wait tables. One place was in my first pastorate in Iron River, at a place called Mr. T's, a little family restaurant. It was easy to see who owned the store and who didn't by the kind of service they gave. It wasn't just Mr. T. and his children who owned the store.

Yes, there were employees who were only consumers of the business. They were there *only* for the money that they were making -- and if they ever gave good service or went above and beyond, it was because they were *made* to do so to keep their job, or it was because they saw potential for a bigger tip, so then they would go overboard.

But there were other employees who, even though they only got a wage, worked as if it was "their store" and they owned it. They took pride in its successes and pain in its failures. They were the ones who made it the cleanest and strove to give the best service. Even if it didn't add anything to their paycheck, they invested their time, talents, and resources into the health of the restaurant. Do we do that with the church? or whatever job or other organizations we are involved in? Paul wrote, "*Whatever* you do, work at it from the soul, as for the Lord and not for people." (Colossians 3:23 CJB *emphasis* added)

Then, from Christ, the model shepherd.

4) How well do we know Jesus, and how well do we know each other?

Jesus says he knew his sheep, called them by name, cared for and loved each one; and his sheep knew him, recognized his voice, and followed. What are we doing in our lives to grow toward Jesus? to know him better? and toward each other to know the flock -- and what are we doing to work with each other and be a force for good for our community?

5) Do we do what is in the best interest of the other?

Jesus said if he had to, he would push his sheep out and in the gate, so they could get out to pasture and life, and into the pen for safety and renewal. Much like in Psalm 23, where he *makes* us lie down in green pastures. Sometimes at great inconvenience to himself, he does what is in the best interest of the health and advancement of his sheep, or his people.

6) Do we seek others?

And it also said Jesus went out and sought people. Sought the lost wandering sheep. Do we seek others? They way Jesus sought, even those who were not of his pen wanted to join.

7) Do we help others find a full life?

is the last question. Jesus said he would help us find a full life. What does it mean to have an abundant life? Someone once answered that question by saying “to have more life than we can handle.” It includes the richness of life -- those things that happen to us that cause us to think we are a really blessed people.

It includes the excitement of life. There is an assumption out there that being a Christian is one of the most boring things in the world. But it doesn't have to be that way. It doesn't repress us, it doesn't force us to do things – it is not like the bat in the cage – that is not what it is like. That is not what it is about. That is the version of what the robbers and thieves bring. It saps our energy and our motivation. But life in Christ is not that way. Yes, there is self-denial, yes there is sacrifice, just as some of these questions might imply. But it leads to a life that is full, valuable, productive, meaningful, and beneficial to ourselves and to others. Life with Christ as our Shepherd and guide leads to a fullness of life that no other avenue can

accomplish for us and for each other. And fullness of life also includes the horrors of life. When life is more than we can handle, it brings us back to the loving care of our God that we need so much.

Joseph Parker preached long ago on verse 10 -- *the thief comes to steal and kill and destroy, [Jesus] has come that they may have life, and have it to the full* -- and he compared the destruction of the bad shepherd with the *construction* of the Good Shepherd. He said, nothing is easier than destruction. It can take years to build a bridge, seconds to bring it down. It can take a lifetime to build a character, it doesn't take very long to destroy it. The church can spend a century quietly building Christian lives without anyone ever noticing, but bring down the building in a dramatic way and everyone remembers it for a long, long time. I've been at several churches where there is a plaque in the parking lot talking about the big fire of nineteen o – why is it we remember the bad stuff so easily and that is what gets engrained and memorialized, but the good stuff, the constant building of lives as disciples, as followers of Christ and all the good things that we do – no one ever notices, even we ourselves often don't notice.

The tempter tries to consume our lives like a lion does a baby gazelle. He chooses the path of least resistance -- the easy way of destruction to his personal gain. Whether we are aware of it or not, Christ has chosen the much more difficult, noble path of prodding us into green pastures, building new life in us. Are we willing to follow where Christ leads – in the long run? Even if it leads up or down dangerous, unpleasant, sometimes exciting, sometimes boring paths -- until we reach those new pastures that we call abundant life? And are we willing to work to construct rather than de-construct ourselves and others?

Prayer Lord, as your sheep, we see our answer in you. To listen to any other is to risk wandering off of the path at risk to ourselves. But even then you seek us out and come and carry back on to the right path and pasture. You bring us back. That is why we celebrate your life in ours. That is why we celebrate the access you give to good pastures. That is why we celebrate each other. That is why we celebrate your faithfulness to us, as the Shepherd who gave his life for his people. Amen.

Music Communion reminds us of all the Creator, Jesus, and Spirit does for us as our Shepherd. – Let's prepare our hearts by recognizing our need for and desire to receive his shepherding care.

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us

1. Savior, like a shepherd lead us, much we need thy tender care;
in thy pleasant pastures feed us, for our use thy folds prepare.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Thou hast bought us, thine we are.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Thou hast bought us, thine we are.
2. We are thine, thou dost befriend us, be the guardian of our way;
keep thy flock, from sin defend us, seek us when we go astray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Hear, O hear us when we pray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Hear, O hear us when we pray.
3. Thou hast promised to receive us, poor and sinful though we be;
thou hast mercy to relieve us, grace to cleanse and power to free.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! We will early turn to thee.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! We will early turn to thee.
4. Early let us seek thy favor, early let us do thy will;
blessed Lord and only Savior, with thy love our bosoms fill.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Thou hast loved us, love us still.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Thou hast loved us, love us still.

Communion

Invitation Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another. Therefore, let's prepare our hearts by confessing our sins before God.

Confession Almighty and merciful God, we know from Ezekiel that when we deliberately offend another, we offend you. We are aware that too often, we have often allowed the shadow of hate to cloud our souls, hiding the light from our unseeking yes. We have thought, and even said unpleasant and hurtful things to others when they fail to live up to our expectations. Grant that we might find that spark of love that ever burns within us, the love that you have shown to us even when we fail you. Fan the embers of that love until it roars again in flames of love, peace, and reconciliation. Forgive us our sins and help us to forgive those who have sinned against us. Lead us into new life through your Son Jesus Christ, who died for the sins of all. Amen.

(Adapted from Michael J. O'Donnell, USA, 20th Cent. in UM Book of Worship)

Assurance The Lord is merciful and gracious, endlessly patient, loving and true, showing mercy to thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and granting pardon. (Jewish Prayer for Forgiveness, USA, 20th Cent. on UM Book of Worship),

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and he invited us to him, saying, Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

The Great Thanksgiving

So, The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Blessed are you, our Alpha and our Omega, beginning and end, whose strong and loving arms encompass the universe, for with your eternal Word and Holy Spirit you are forever one God. Through your Word you created all things and called them good, and in you we live and move and have our being. When we fell into sin, you did not desert us. You made covenant with your people and spoke through prophets and teachers. In Jesus Christ your Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:



Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son, Jesus Christ, who called you Abba, Father. As a mother tenderly gathers her children, you embraced a people as your own and filled them with a longing for a peace that would last and for a justice that would never fail. In Jesus' suffering and death, he took upon himself our sin and death and destroyed their power forever. Then you from the dead this same Jesus, who now reigns with you in glory, and poured upon us your Holy Spirit, making us the people of your new covenant.

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and "wine", that in the breaking of this bread and the drinking of this fruit from the vine, we may know the presence of the living Christ -- and be renewed as the body of Christ for the world, redeemed by Christ's blood.

As the grain and grapes, once dispersed in the fields, are now united on this table in bread and drink, so may we and all your people be gathered from every time and place into the unity of your eternal household and feast at your table for ever. Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever. Amen.

The Bread and Cup On the night before meeting with death, Jesus took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to the disciples, and said: "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." [Take and eat]

When the supper was over Jesus took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to the disciples, and said: "Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." [Take and Drink]

Communion Prayer Eternal God, we give you thanks for this holy mystery to which you have given yourself to us as the shepherd who gives his life for us as a blood covenant creating peace with God. Grant that we may go into the world in the strength of your Spirit, to give ourselves to others, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Music ... Now having remembered his covenant of peace with his people, live fearlessly in that peace wherever your week may take you in the days ahead...Let's stand and sing...

Go Now in Peace (3x)

Go now in peace, go now in peace,
may the love of God surround you
everywhere, everywhere, you may go...

CCLI # 2561297

Blessing Go now with your trust in the good shepherd, knowing that God is at your side, including in dark valleys of life, caring for you with ever faithful love and mercy; so that we too may care and love, not just in words, but in truth and action. Amen.