

**The Fourth Sunday of Easter**  
**May 6 & 7, 2006**  
**Homily by Rev Timothy A Leitzke**

This gospel always reminds me of the advice my mother gave me when I began seminary. She said, “Don’t get up in the pulpit on Good Shepherd Sunday and call the congregation a bunch of mindless sheep.” I guess she figured we need reminding even of the most obvious things. This week while I was anticipating reading this Gospel I began redecorating my office and while we were debating colors and fabrics I was asked, “Now how about the desk?” It took me a minute to realize what was being asked. My tiny little desk and my tiny little computer table had been configured one way since the outset of my ministry here ten months ago. Somehow, despite the insignificant size of the desk and table, I had forgotten that they could be moved. We swung the desk out to form an ‘L’ and it was wonderful. I was a new man, with a new office and a new outlook. Sometimes we need reminding even of the most obvious things.

We need reminding because sometimes the most obvious things aren’t obvious and we overlook the most basic things. Every year on the Fourth Sunday of Easter we get the reminder from St John’s gospel that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He can be trusted because the sheep are his. He won’t run and hide when times are tough. He loves his sheep and will stay with them. It is one of the most comforting and beloved passages in all of scripture. I always feel incredible peace and calm when I read it. There are times when I feel helpless, stupid, or defenseless. I need someone to watch over me. I need a green pasture to play in. I

need to swim in an ocean of gospel and have my sins and my fears washed away. Jesus' words promise me that and I treasure them. I need that reminder of God's unconditional love. I need a reminder in the midst of Sin that God is with me. I need a reminder of the joy that awaits in the resurrection.

I need that reminder because I forget. No matter how well I know the gospel I forget it. Martin Luther writes in his *Large Catechism*: "Let me tell you this. Even though you know the Word perfectly and have already mastered everything, you are daily under the dominion of the devil, and he does not rest day or night in seeking to take you unawares and to kindle in your heart unbelief and wicked thoughts...." Sin is such an infuriating thing; it never quits. So we forget the Gospel. We need reminding from scripture and prayer and from our contact with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Why do we go to worship? We need the constant reminder of God's love. When we take God's love as a given we forget that it is given. The words of Jesus the Good Shepherd are always a pertinent reminder of God's unfailing love and the joy that we have in Christ.

Friends of Christ, what shall we do with this joy? How shall we live knowing that Christ is our shepherd? The Second Reading today was from 1 John and in Weekday Spirituality on Wednesday we talked about why 1 John was written. It was, *probably*, written to emphasize that what happens in our world matters. It is easy to read the Gospel of John and forget about one's troubles, it is soothing to escape from this world, and it is tempting to ignore our real life. 1 John reminds us of the importance of what Christ did *in this world*: "In this we have

known The Love, that he laid down his soul for us”, and in the same breath 1 John answers our question “what shall we do”, “and *we* ought to lay down our souls for the brothers [and sisters].” The writer even says that if one ignores another in need the love of God does not remain! That’s probably going too far; the point is clear: our actions in the world matter a great deal. When we rearranged my office it was lovely. I felt so much more relaxed at my desk. If I had not sat down and worked at it I would have wasted that gift. In a way the gift would not have remained with me. Christ’s life, death, and resurrection mean something for us in this world, and the Holy Spirit calls us to follow Christ’s lead in loving and redeeming this world and our human brothers and sisters.

Two months ago members of this congregation set five visions for ministry at Holy Trinity: <sup>1</sup>To evangelize Sunday School parents; <sup>2</sup>to better incorporate new members into our faith life together; <sup>3</sup>to foster better communication internally and externally; <sup>4</sup>to identify and manage our spiritual gifts; and <sup>5</sup>to coordinate among those who need help and those who want to help. Friends of Christ these visions are the product of God’s amazing grace, of God’s unbelievable love revealed to us in Christ who laid down his soul for us. These visions are our way of laying down our souls for others. We perceive our brothers and sisters in Christ who are in need and we want to get the word to our brothers and sisters in Christ who can help. Everyone has something to offer and we want to figure out what those gifts are for each of us. We’re all in this together and we want to communicate so we can be on the same page. We’re regularly blessed with people who wish to become part of

our fellowship in Christ. We are trying, intentionally and actively, to welcome them so that they are not “them”, but “us”. We have a flourishing Sunday School and we want the children and their parents to join us in worship—whatever the worship time—because we think that we’re onto something here with Christ. In Gathering, in hearing God’s Word, in eating God’s Meal, and in being Sent back into the world we are shaped by God’s grace and we want others to experience it.

Friends of Christ let us not love merely in words but in deeds and in truth. Doing God’s work has the bonus that we know that we are doing God’s work. By reminding others of the joy we have in Christ we help remind ourselves. Being Christian can burn you out. Baptism is not a ticket to a trouble-free life. We need reminding of the Gospel, and we are called to remind others of the Gospel by how we live in this world. God loves us for free. When we respond by loving others we remind ourselves of that love, and no matter what Sin does to us to make us fear and doubt and hurt we know that God is greater than we are and knows all and chases away Sin. The peace and calm that God offers in the Good Shepherd draw us here. The love of God in the Good Shepherd sends us into the world to share the good news with others. We live it and hear it and taste it and smell it and touch it again and again because we need reminding. When we take God’s love as a given we forget that it is given. Sometimes we need reminding even of the most obvious things. We need to hear that “in this we have known God’s love: that Christ laid down his soul for us, and we ought to lay down our souls for others.”

Amen