

First Congregational United Church of Christ

*Empowered by the Holy Spirit and with the help of God,
we open our doors and hearts to all, in service and love as modeled by Jesus Christ.*



*Fourth Sunday of Easter
The Season of Eastertide
A Celebration of the Good Shepherd*

*The Lord's Day
Fourth Sunday of Easter
The Season of Eastertide
A Celebration of the Good Shepherd
Nine o'clock in the Morning*

The Worship of God

Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of the conscience by God's holiness; the nourishment of the mind with God's truth; the purifying of the imagination by God's beauty; the opening of the heart to God's love; the surrender of the will to God's purpose—all of this gathered up in adoration.

~William Temple

The Prologue

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is always the Sunday of the Good Shepherd, a liturgical feast day reminding the flock of who is ultimately in charge of the apostolic and catholic, the universal Church, and every local church, the whole of this ecclesiastical enterprise. On this day, we hear the most well-known of the Psalms, the Twenty-Third, and are reminded that its meanings go far beyond words of comfort spoken or sung at funerals. Despite arguments to the contrary, most folks regard sheep as having lesser intelligence in the pecking order of the animal kingdom. We have all heard the phrase, "Dumb as sheep!" And yet, strangely, or perhaps sadly, the sheep is the cloven animal Jesus designated for making comparisons to those who chose to follow him! O well, Jesus once compared himself to a chicken! And, of course, we frequently read in the Hebrew Bible about numerous comparisons to a variety of animals. Perhaps, in the final analysis, any old barnyard animal will do! Then again, maybe not! "Old MacDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O!" Today, we look at all things sheep, all things shepherd! Baah . . .!

The Proclamation

An Ancient Easter Acclamation

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The Call to Worship and Welcome

The Spirit of the still speaking God be with you.

And also with you.

The Music for Contemplation

The Lighting of the Altar Candles

The Gathering

Little children, gather as one in the house of the Holy! Come faithful sheep, one and all, seeking the Good Shepherd who knows each one of us by name!

Our hearts long for the One whose love abides within us, who seeks the sheep and gathers them all together!

Our shepherding God leaves us wanting for nothing, filling us with the Holy Spirit, restoring our souls, reviving our spirits in this sacred time of worship!

Shepherd of goodness, spread your table before us in this hour! Anoint us with holy presence, overflowing our cups with goodness and mercy!

Let us worship God!

The Introit, No. 65 (*Chalice Praise*)

Psalm 23

Andra Moran

The Collect

Let us pray to the Lord,

Shepherding God, we have gathered to worship the great shepherd, the Holy One who is greater than our imagination, the One who knows our hearts and whose love abides within us; fill us with your Holy Spirit in this sacred hour of worship; make us to lie down in the restful green pastures of this sacred setting, surely leading us beside the still and peaceful waters of this sanctuary; calm our spirits as you restore our souls as sheep of your fold; as we gather before a table of grace spread before us this day, may the sure and certain goodness and mercy of the Good Shepherd surround and sustain us; may the grace of God carry us as if on wings of eagles through all the days of our lives; all this we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the holy and still speaking Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

*The Opening Hymn, No. 558 *Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us*

BRADBURY

*The Litany of Praise

Our shepherding God leaves us wanting for nothing!

The Holy One makes us lie down in green pastures, leading us beside still waters!

The Good Shepherd restores our souls, always leading us in right paths, honoring the name of God!

God walks with us through the darkest valleys, calming our fears! God is with us despite the evil that may surround us!

The rod and staff of the Holy One continually comfort us! The Good Shepherd prepares a table before us, anointing our heads with oil! Our cups are overflowing!

The goodness and mercy of God follow us every day! We shall dwell in the house of the Lord our whole life long! Praise the Lord!

*The Gloria

GREATOREX

Glory to the Creator, and to the Christ, and to the Comforter!

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,

World without end! Amen! Amen!

The Call to Confession¹

All of us have taken vows of loyalty, choosing to follow Jesus, our Good Shepherd, promising to serve Christ. Unfortunately, sometimes we forget those commitments, failing to honor our words. More frequently than we would like to admit, we find it way too easy to push aside the commands God has given us in favor of our own desires. If we are honest, we tend to be more interested in pleasing ourselves than in pleasing God. Listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd, returning to the intent that the Holy One inspires within us. In the sacred silence and stillness of our moments together, let us confess before the Holy.

The Silent Confession

The Corporate Confession²

Let us pray to the Lord,

Shepherding God, so many times have we wandered down the wrong pathways afforded by our world. How often we have ventured into dead-end streets that looked more inviting than the narrow ways marked by the signpost of your shepherding love. We have trusted other voices than the Shepherd and turned away like fickle sheep from your truth. It is easy to accept your gifts without thankful acknowledgment. On more occasions than we care to admit, we have failed to use our overflowing cups to fill the cups of sisters and brothers who need what we can offer. We know we are in the wrong and cannot defend our actions when we turn away from siblings, fellow sheep who are also beloved by you, no matter who they are, or how they may differ from us. After all, we know you have sheep of other folds! We seek the forgiveness you promise and the health you offer. Forgive us, we pray, and restore us to your fold.

The Assurance of Pardon³

Beloved faith community, hear the good news of Eastertide and the Good Shepherd. We are forgiven and are restored to wholeness. The abiding love of God accompanies us, allowing us to share it with others. Our souls will be fed when we focus on feeding others. We will be empowered by prayer and generosity.

Thanks be to God!

The Time for the Children

Nancy Diepenbrock

The Witness from the Epistles

I JOHN 3:16-24

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and sisters. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before God whenever our hearts condemn us, for God is greater than our hearts, and God knows everything.

Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God, and we receive from God whatever we ask, because we obey God's commandments and do what pleases God. And this is God's commandment, that we should believe in the name of the Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as God has commanded us. All who obey God's commandments abide in God, and God abides in them. And by this we know that God abides in us, by the Spirit that God has given us!

Listen to what the Spirit of the still speaking God is saying!
Thanks be to God!

The Response, PSALM 23

CAROL

*As faithful shepherds tend their flocks, so God will care for us!
And from God's store of grace our needs are met with holy trust!
In pastures green, by waters still, our souls new life do take!
And in the paths of righteousness we follow, for God's sake!*

*When death surrounds we will not fear, God's strength dispels our dread!
We hold God's blessing in our hearts and face our fears instead!
For as a lamb, our comfort rests upon the Shepherd's rod,
To bring us home, where'er we stray into the fold of God!*

*A bounteous feast for us is placed in the presence of our foes!
Our heads with oil the Lord anoints, our cups with grace o'erflows!
The loving-kindness of the Lord is ours for all our days!
And in God's house for evermore we'll join with songs of praise!*

The Witness from the Gospels

JOHN 10:11-18

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

The Gospel for today!
Thanks be to God!

The Sermon

Love Is as Love Does!

Timothy W. Shirley

The Hymn for Eastertide, No. 79

God Is My Shepherd

BROTHER JAMES' AIR

The Concerns of the Church

The Pastoral Prayer
The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and
forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever!
Amen.**

The Receiving of Our Gifts

The Offertory

*The Doxology

OLD HUNDREDTH

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!
Praise Christ all creatures here below!
Praise Holy Spirit, evermore!
Praise triune God whom we adore!*

*The Prayer of Thanksgiving

*The Closing Hymn, No. 80 *My Shepherd, You Supply My Need*

RESIGNATION

*The Extinguishing of the Altar Candles

*The Procession of the Light

*The Benediction and Blessing

To our guests! At your choosing, we invite you to join us in a long-standing tradition at First Congregational United Church of Christ as we form a circle, joining hands and singing together our Fellowship Song.

*The Fellowship Song *Let There Be Peace on Earth*

WORLD PEACE

*Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.
With every step I take, let this be my joyous creed.
To take each moment and live each moment in peace, eternally!
Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.*

The Music for Reflection

*You are invited to stand as you are able.

Lector: Joy Turpin

Ushers: Mary Lou Congdon and Susan Krivichi

*The color for Easter Day, the Resurrection of the Lord,
and for the Season of Eastertide is White, symbolizing purity and victory, and
reminding us of Jesus' victory over death on the cross and his glorious resurrection.*

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First Congregational UCC - Eagle River, WI

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