



Sermon for The Fourth Sunday of Easter

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

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Acts 4: 5-12

1 John 3:16-24

John 20:11-18

Psalm 23

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love.

Look around you. We are a group of people living lives rich with different experiences and emotions. Friday morning it was crisp with blue skies and sunshine. A beautiful day. I was feeling on top of the world. Driving down Cecil Rd in Post Falls I glanced at two children playing in the garden. One was dressed as a princess and her brother as a dragon. Seeing those happy children playing, not a care in the world took my mood from happy to simply ecstatic. It just couldn't get any better. Talking of emotions, these are many and varied.

How do you feel today?

Anyone feeling just calm?

Anyone feeling grateful?

Anyone feeling happy?

How do we feel when stopped for speeding?

How do we feel when a child or grandchild gives us that special smile? Don't you just melt?

We certainly are emotional creatures, aren't we?

And those of you who own and love dogs? You know instinctively when your dog is sad or down, right? Of course, you can see when your dog is exuberant!

So, what have emotions to do with Good Shepherd Sunday? We are called to follow the Shepherd.

Let me relate an emotional true-life story: Many years ago, the opportunity arose of being involved with a startup biomedical company. The technology looked intriguing, was patented and preliminary laboratory data presented looked promising. It was time to move it into major clinical trials. As an employee, I was given a set of clinical data to analyze and write up in clinical paper format. It was claimed this had been from a small patient volume Phase I clinical trial. After a good period of work, the paper was completed to satisfaction, and it became part of a submission to the FDA for permission to proceed with further clinical studies, Phase II and beyond. Shortly after this, several financial events led to the company closing its doors. I moved on.

Imagine the visceral shock and total horror a couple of months later when I received a phone call from an investigator from the FDA office of Investigations. He wanted to meet right away. It turned out that the small study that I had been given to analyze was all hypothecated. Made up. You can undoubtedly add a whole string of other adjectives here! And furthermore, the former founder claimed that I was responsible for it all. When the investigator asked who had typed the paper, there was only one honest answer: me. I can still visualize his icy, flinty stare as undoubtedly, he figured he had the proverbial "smoking gun." The company founder was hanging me out to dry.

You can imagine the draining emotional downward spiral. That sinking feeling in the pit of the stomach, weak at the knees. Despair almost. And forget about sleep.

Sadly, the realization that naivety meant I hadn't smelled a problem earlier. The hard, harsh reality hit me viscerally, right in the gut that I was up against a master con artist. He was a professional liar and swindler if you wish. This would require some heavy-duty defense. Fortunately, I had just the right lawyer. My karate instructor, who had served as a member of the NSA in Vietnam. He, thankfully, took me at my word, and he went to work. It was a long onerous four months and a lot of investigative work. What an emotional roller coaster for those long, interminable months and a legal fee of \$12,000!

Faith and honesty prevailed, and I am the proud holder and owner of an official letter from the investigator at the FDA exonerating me completely and in legal language, almost apologizing for what he had put me through. Talk about an emotion of pure utter exuberance combined with weak-kneed relief!

Emotions. Thank the Spirit for faith. Thank the Good Lord for Janet's unfailing love and support.

In today's lesson Peter and John were brought in front of the Jewish rulers, elders and doctors of the law in Jerusalem and asked, "By what power, or by what name have such men as you done this?" To put this rather simply, they had, through the power of the Holy Spirit healed a sick man. Here he was, standing fit and well in front of the accusers. ¹ (Real live evidence indeed!)

If we read beyond today's lesson in Acts, Peter and John were told to leave the room and await the decision of the accusers.² Can you imagine the roller coaster emotions Peter and John must have felt? Faith notwithstanding, I feel I have just a little inkling of their emotional state. I'm sure each of you can imagine their emotions as well.

As for the emotions of the accusers, they didn't know what to do with the disciples. Talk about a quandary. Peter and John were discharged and told not to speak of this miracle. We all know Peter's answer to that one! Back with their friends, they were on an emotional high, very, very clearly ecstatic.

Ah, emotion.

In today's gospel, Jesus says: "I am the good shepherd, I know my own sheep and my sheep know me – as the Father knows me and I know the Father – I lay down my life for the sheep." And Jesus adds little later "…I lay down my life in order to take it up again."³ We prayed in today's Collect "grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us by name, and follow where he leads."⁴

Martin Luther in a sermon on the Good Shepherd in 1523 preached that "Christ as one will reject nobody,"⁵ The opportunity is open to all of us. That should make us happy!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor and theologian and anti-Nazi dissident. In his 1937 book *The Cost of Discipleship*, he wrote about the role of Christianity in a secular world. Dietrich was executed by the Nazi's in a concentration camp on April 9, 1945. Some of his writings include "The world exercises dominion by force and Christ and Christians conquer by service." He further wrote that the most dangerous law of all, is the law of the world and "cheap" grace. (Cheap grace is preaching of forgiveness without repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession and so on.) "In our effort to combat legalism we land ourselves in the worst kind of legalism. The only way of overcoming this legalism is by real obedience to Christ when he calls us to follow him; for in Jesus the law is at once fulfilled and cancelled." When Dietrich faced death, can you imagine his faith, and his emotions when he acknowledged that this was the end for him, but yet the beginning of life.⁶ It's hard to imagine the likely mixture of sadness, trepidation and yet pending joy all at once.

Ron Rolheiser, a Canadian Catholic priest and theologian writes that we are surrounded by many voices, some inviting us in, promising life if we do certain actions or buy a certain product; some threaten us. Other voices beckon us towards hatred, bitterness and anger, while others challenge us towards love, graciousness and forgiveness. Familiar emotions tug at us from all directions, don't they? So, amongst all

the voices that surround and call to us, how do we discern the unique cadence of God's voice? Which is the voice of the Good Shepherd? As Ron puts it: "There is no easy answer, but we have a number of principles that come to us from Jesus, from scripture, and from deep wells of our Christian tradition that can help us."⁷ The Sacraments are a means of grace. The voice of God is recognized wherever one sees life, joy, health, color and humor." The voice of God is always heard wherever there is genuine enjoyment and gratitude. We also note that God speaks through all events. God is present. What is God saying each and every moment?

In her sermon in April 2021 based on today's readings, the Rev. Carole Horton-Howe at St. Mathias in Whittier California wrote:

"The Greek word for "good" in this scripture is kalos. And kalos is good in the moral and ethical sense but it's more than that – its goodness with a refined quality of beauty and loveliness that is joyful and childlike with a delight that draws us in. This goodness in our good shepherd reminds us that we belong. Knowing what we know about Jesus' role, we understand better our own role. We belong – to the one flock loved and protected by the one shepherd. Together we listen to the one voice, and it is so compelling that we are called to take on those qualities and share them with others. We are called, quite simply by our Good Shepherd to do the loving thing."⁸

What an exciting emotional moment of pure joy for us: to know that we belong, and we are protected by the Shepherd, and we should do the loving thing! May this lift you to that heightened moment of absolute joyful exuberance like when driving down the road and saw those children simply enjoying life. Amen

1 Acts 4, 5-12

2 Acts 4, 16-18

3 John 10, 11-18

4 Today's Collect

5 Dr. Martin Luther's writings: <https://sermons.martinluther.us>sermons> 58

6 International Bonhoeffer Society: <https://bonhoeffersociety.org>

7 Ron Rolheiser: <https://ronrolheiser.com>

8 St Mathias Episcopal Church Whittier California Archives: <https://www.stmathiaswhittier.org>