



## ***Fourth Sunday of Easter, Apr. 26, 2026***

*Sermon, the Rev. Dr. David T. Gortner*

[Acts 2:42-47](#)

[Psalms 23](#)

[1 Peter 2:19-25](#)

[John 10:1-10](#)

Alleluia, Christ is risen! *The Lord is risen indeed, alleluia!*

We continue in our celebration of these 50 Days of Easter on this fourth Sunday known as Good Shepherd Sunday. We have been immersed in the images from scripture of Jesus as the shepherd caring for the sheep, as a sheep giving itself as sacrifice, and as the gate for safety and the gateway to free and filling pasture. We were blessed to hear that treasured Psalm, Psalm 23, read to us in Hebrew today – thank you, Nev, for this gift to us.

Today, I want to hold these images of shepherd and sheep and gate and good pasture, focusing particularly on the sheep as they are together. These sheep that are a herd together, a sort of body of individuals knit together over time. I want to focus on the beautiful image of Holy Community, and how we meet God and experience the guiding, loving presence of God in communities of trust. An image of the Church over the centuries has been the image of a flock. And, in any place, in any given time, we are the holy community of a flock moving together.

Just this last week, in Eagle, Idaho, people came in record numbers to see the annual crossing of over 2500 sheep through the town, down along a stretch of highway 55 to a crossing, and then off into ranchland that is higher countryside for the summer months. It is an amazing spectacle to see – and you can see videos of it posted on YouTube. And it seems miraculous! Here are all these sheep, together, moving pretty darn quickly together and responding to each other side by side in a mass of moving white. As they move in a great cluster together, there are some wanderers who get off the road for the tasty morsels growing alongside the road, and inevitably a string of a few who follow the wanderers. But they don't get far, and they respond quickly to their guides who guide them back into the flow of the group – so they remain together and in harmony with the others thanks to the shepherds and faithful sheepdogs who redirect them and keep them all moving forward. This herd moves together in trust of each other and of their guides who care for them.

Abiding with each other doesn't just mean hanging out in perfect stillness and passive chilling with each other – it also means moving with each other, being tied into each other's promptings and interests and responses to the environment around us.

The scene we heard today from the book of Acts is that beautiful scene of early joyful and energized harmony in the earliest days of the Church. Listen to how their life was, together.

*Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

This togetherness was in devotion to Now with each other, Now in openness to the Holy Spirit touching them, Now in movement into the world around them, and Future oriented toward making real the kingdom of God that they believed with whole hearts would be coming soon. Awe and wonder, sharing all things together, freely caring for any in need, in each other's homes often, joy in each other's presence. It is full-bodied togetherness – not just with each other, but with one another oriented fully toward God, loving God and each other with whole hearts, minds, wills, and bodily strengths and senses.

Over my lifetime, I have been blessed to find and witness groups of people living with this kind of bond and energy. Just this last week, I had the deep pleasure of such a group supporting each other fully, gathered for a house blessing after the traumatic death of a husband, sharing a meal with each other, joining each other in memories of life in the countries from which they came, weaving concerns and wishes and yearnings and joys together in a tapestry of conversation that was also prayer, getting ready to dance together (I left before staying too long to embarrass myself). They are supporting each other in this vibrant community of friends who have found each other in this region, even offering space to live for some times that are necessary.

This is holy community. The bonds we form in these kinds of groups are deep, touching and filling our spirits in ways that nothing else can.

This is the kind of community that God desires for us and invites us to find and form together. This is the kind of bond that we begin to form in the holy, imperfect communion of the Church. We find and experience bonds of peace, offers of care and lovingkindness, moments of sharing in deep trust. We learn more about ourselves and adjust ourselves as we abide with each other. As we share in prayer and praise, in work and play, together, we begin to glimpse visions of what can be between and among us all. In holy community, we are knit together – as one body.

Marriage is just such a community. It is a sacrament – a place of God's promised grace, when lived with honest, full-hearted and unreserved mutual affection and commitment. As a sacrament, it stands as a sign for us – a window into God's grace that flows through this relationship and through every human relationship where we dare to embrace one another with care and affection, hold and honor each other in full respect, and open ourselves to give fully to each other. Marriage is an icon, a way for us to glimpse how we can be in relationship with God, in mutual love and delight – and a way for us to glimpse the fullness of relationships that will be between us all as the kingdom of God breaks forth.

Today, we join Ian and Janet in their recognition of 50 years together and their commitment to each other in the years to come. God grant them many years! As we join them, we can enter into prayerful reflection and thanksgiving for the relationships that are important in our lives – our marriages, our families, our close friendships, our companions and comrades in our work, our neighborhoods, and all along life's journey.

All relationships bring their challenges. The blessing of love in holy community is that it continues to teach us, instruct us, stretch us. We endure and work through each others failings – and our own. We wrestle with each other in our differing ideas and perspectives and interests and aims. We continue to hold each other and walk with each other through all sorts of joys and sorrows.

There are some lines. We do not endure or accept abuse or intentional cruelty. We do not pass lightly over unfaithfulness. We do not, at least intentionally, accept dishonesty that comes with manipulation and so many forms of addiction. All of these violate the fundamental bond of trust, mutual respect, and shared self-giving that is the essential core of healthy, holy, life-giving relationships – of which marriage is our sacramental icon.

Any of us who hold responsibility for any group or community know that there is a holy bond of trust that we must honor and treasure. The group will flourish as we give people space to flourish, structures and pathways to make sense of being together, and a secure environment that opens a true sense of safety in which people are free to be.

Jesus gives his disciples an image of himself as the gate, of God as shepherd, and of relationship with Jesus as a relationship of safety, honesty, and care. It is God who is, ultimately, the shepherd of every human being. And God is ultimately trustworthy, caring, and close. As Christians, we see in Jesus the ultimate embodiment of God's loving, guiding, abiding presence.

As that English Methodist pastor that I've quoted before said, Pastor Leslie Weatherhead in the decade after World War II, "When Christ ascended, they never felt he had gone... Every day they felt he was a kind of personal energy within them, reinforcing them from inside... Nowadays Christ does not often 'appear' to people, but he visits their thoughts, he visits their feelings, he visits their wills – and then, their thinking about other people and life and the world is broad and noble and true, they can get on better with difficult folk and are not so easily ruffled, and they determine in Christ's name to build a new world where God's good gifts can be shared among all" (*The Resurrection and the Life*, 1948, p. 22).

From our scriptures today, here are the verbs showing Jesus' action in our lives, the ways that through Christ God is leading, guiding, loving, and abiding with us.

<i>makes me lie down</i>	<i>leads me</i>	<i>revives my soul</i>	<i>guides me</i>
<i>spread a table before me</i>	<i>anoints my head</i>	<i>suffered for us</i>	<i>bore our sins</i>
<i>healed us</i>	<i>calls us each by name goes ahead of us</i>		
<i>came that we may have life</i>			

What makes holy community possible is the ways that God moves among us – within us each individually, but much more among and between us. We see and find Christ in each other, as we enter into relationship and stay in relationship with each other. And, if we listen, we move as the Spirit of God leads us. Just like the sheep moving together in amazing harmony – a symphony of movement, with corrections along the way but a consistent spirit of togetherness in trust of the One who is leading them all on their journey. It is this trust that brings us again and again to this table, where the Shepherd of all our souls meets us and gives himself to us in the bread and wine we share, and we are knit together truly and completely – more than we can grasp – as one Body, on the move, carrying the grace and love of God into the world.