

A Fourth Sunday of Easter 2026  
Saint Barnabas's Church, Falmouth MA  
The Rev David Rider  
April 26, 2026

John 10:1-10

Good morning, St Barnabas, and welcome to the Fourth Sunday of Easter!

I know you leapt out of bed this morning to embrace Jesus' role as the Good Shepherd

Happy Good Shepherd Sunday!

If that's not enough, we also switch gears to embrace John's Gospel today and for the next few weeks to metabolize his take on shepherding and abundant life

Every year amid the fifty days of Easter, we encounter one of the best known and beloved passages from Scripture—the story of Jesus as the Good Shepherd

Although this story remains a great vignette from which to preach, it also should be viewed as a text fraught with the peril of familiarity in which we know the story so well that important revelation can be missed

We face the temptation to domesticate, in which we turn the suffering Redeemer of the world into a warm and fuzzy object at a petting zoo

All these risks demand that we step back and attempt to discover anew why John—but no other gospel writer—includes this story in his Good News proclamation

First, let's recognize that Jesus reworks a long tradition of good/bad associations with shepherding

The shepherd—or *poimen* in Greek—was a ubiquitous figure in the ancient world

In Exodus 3, God appeared to Moses while Moses was tending sheep

Later, in I Samuel, David learned the art of war by defending his flocks against predators (I Sam 17:34-35)

In a negative diatribe, Ezekiel lambasted the religious leaders of Israel who slaughter the fatlings, clothe themselves with the wool, but fail to feed the sheep of Israel (Ezekiel 34:2-3)

Outside of Israel, in the Greco-Roman world, the shepherd's metaphor was used for Aeschylus' Agamemnon the king

In today's passage, it is no accident that Jesus identifies himself as the 'good' shepherd, because the profession had a mixed reputation

While shepherds could be idealized as animal huggers—with the nostalgic and bucolic sounds of panpipes—shepherds also aroused suspicion and were perceived as rough, unscrupulous characters

They often pastured their animals on other people's land, they pilfered wool, milk and kids from other flocks and were seen by their critics as the first-century equivalents of used-car salesmen

Of course, Jesus rightfully invokes himself as the 'good' shepherd, because he pays the full price and lays down his life for the sake of the flock, where mere hirelings run when the going gets tough

Hence, we read this passage about Jesus during the 50 days of Easter—as opposed to the lazy days of summer—making joyful connections to Jesus’ death/resurrection for the redemption of this world

So shepherding appears often in Scripture—usually with the shepherd as a wily, untrustworthy character about whom you would scream at your daughter or granddaughter if she considered dating one on [Match.com](https://www.Match.com)

Jesus presumes this when he goes out of his way to disparage the thief and bandit—the bad shepherd—in contrast to his being the Good

Comparing ourselves to sheep can sound like being damned with faint praise

Sheep keep getting lost, can be truly smelly and—let’s admit it—were not the brightest breed on Noah’s Ark

But Jesus also speaks to our hearts, speaks to our deepest needs for dependency, when he assures us that he knows us by name

Like a good parent and child in a crowded space, Jesus assures us that we will know his voice and he will know ours, regardless of how lost we might feel in a harrowing moment of time

I am sure that’s why we all love to sing that beautiful hymn:

The King of love my shepherd is,  
Whose goodness faileth never;  
I nothing lack if I am his,  
And he is mine forever.

For some reason that escapes me, the metaphor of Jesus as Shepherd always wins out over Jesus as Gate: we never celebrate Good Gate Sunday

Yet Jesus in John's Gospel proclaims boldly, "I am the gate."

"Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture."

We celebrate Jesus as the Gate, the boundary that protects us from bad forces, perhaps especially those dystopic forces found in the dark reaches of the internet

If you were a seafarer going nowhere fast upon the Strait of Hormuz, how would your soul linger on these promises of going out or coming in to fast safe pasture?

If that's not enough, John concludes our section of today's Gospel with Jesus' making a wildly audacious claim amid our time of war and cultural acrimony

"I [Jesus] come that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Wow! I'll take some of that

Especially in the Middle East—Gaza or Iran or in war-torn Ukraine—most of us yearn simply for the first half of Jesus' promise: 'that they may have life'

We pray for those in harm's way and count ourselves fortunate if our heads hit tonight's pillow with a modicum of rest

And now Jesus wants us to embrace abundance?

On one wavelength in today's world, the idea of abundance sounds wildly crazy and utopian

And yet, there it is: abundance

On the Second Sunday of Easter, Jesus embraced Thomas and beckoned his shell-shocked disciples to cast out fear

Last week, the risen Christ broke bread with his crestfallen disciples and blew their circuits when they connected the dots in his resurrection appearance

Today, Jesus calls us to be equally counter-intuitive and embrace abundance among us

In today's Sunday Forum, we discussed the 'dialogue' between the Pope and our President—a wild debate by any measure

In the spirit of today's Good Shepherd passage, which of our two dialogue partners is lifting up abundance as a core dimension of the spiritual quest?

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus recognizes our vulnerability and our occasionally scraggly nature

He journeys out onto the precipice to snatch us in love and pull us out of harm's way

As the one who made it through Holy Week, Jesus brings awesome street cred to life's harrowing days

Whether I go down to the dust in 30 days or 30 years, I trust that Jesus remains the Good Shepherd in this life and the gateway to abundant living on both sides of the grave

As we enter another week of war, cultural chaos and cleaning up the Washington Hilton, embrace Jesus' promise of abundant life, even amidst its vulnerability and uncertainty

Maintain your prayer life and spiritual center, get outdoors to breathe our remarkably fresh air and embrace the beauty of this Spring season

Continue good self-care while serving those inside and outside of our parish family and larger Upper Cape community

Continue a resurrection witness that proclaims that new life overcomes the grave and that blessing wins out over the thieves and bandits of this world

If you have died on a cross, you will never be naïve, but like Jesus, you can always remain hopeful

As we continue the great 50 days of Easter, let's embrace the Good Shepherd, taste the abundance of this life, and exude a resurrection vision of life that triumphs over death

Alleluia. Christ is risen.  
The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.