

Sunday Sermon April 19, 2026

We Are God's People, the Flock of the Lord...

Our scripture readings for this Good Shepherd Sunday had me thinking about Christian Community all week. Christian community, which we often refer to as “church.”

In today's first reading from the Book of Acts, Luke the Gospel writer paints an idyllic picture of the early Christian community. He writes of their devotion in coming together for the breaking of bread and the prayers, for what will come to be known as the Eucharist.

He speaks of their being in “awe” of the wonders and signs that were taking place through believers, and how they held things in common, and sold their possessions to support the needy, and how they continued with temple worship.

Luke paints a picture of a community characterized by joy, generosity and thankful praise, and while we do not know if this was aspiration or reality, we do know that the early Christian community grew by leaps and bounds, even as followers of Jesus faced of persecution and death.

Today's Gospel is the first 10 verses of the Good Shepherd Discourse in John. Here we find community characterized as a flock of sheep following the shepherd. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who cares for the sheep – you and I. A simple, beautiful depiction often captured in paintings and stained glass windows and children's bibles.

Today's passage describes how shepherds herded their sheep into a common enclosure – a sheepfold – each night. The fold had a single entrance and the shepherds would take turns laying across the opening to keep out the predators and thieves. Literally laying down their lives...

In the morning, the shepherds would lead their sheep out to pasture, calling their sheep by name or piping or singing a tune. The sheep would not follow a stranger, only the one whose voice they knew and trusted.

Again, a beautiful, idyllic picture of community joined together as a flock hearing and following the voice of the good shepherd leading them to verdant pastures and beside still waters.

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.....

We are created for community, for it is in community that we find comfort, protection, correction, fellowship... love.

I'll never forget the Sunday after Hurricane Ian, the first Sunday we gathered at Peace Church. We were shellshocked, bewildered and afraid, but we were so anxious to be together, to tell our stories, to support each other, to know that we are not alone, that God was with us, and we were with and for each other. The chatter in the room before the service, the hugs, the tears, the stories. The flock needed to be together in that holy place. Coming together helped us heal.

I hear that often from our friends who join by livestream. They talk about how they love seeing people: "oh, there's Bruce," "there's Sally..." We are connected to each other even through the internet. That's the beauty and power of Christian community, even when there are miles of distance, we are held together by bonds of love that unite us to God and each other. Unite us to people we might not otherwise connect with, causing us to miss the face of God, and the Kingdom of Love, in our midst.

In my previous parish in Duluth, I got to know a young man whose name was Anthony. He would come and see me looking for a handout, and he often did odd jobs around the church. As I got to know him, I learned that he had been kicked out of the house as a young teenager when he came out to his parents. Kicked out onto the streets, at 16, for "religious" reasons...

He surfed couches and lived on the streets, and he picked up some bad habits like drinking too much and fighting. One night he got into a fight outside a local establishment, and he made the mistake of hitting a police officer. He was convicted of a felony and sent to jail.

In that same parish there was a woman named Anita who was truly one of the holiest people I have ever met. I have no doubt that her ears were ever attuned to the voice of the Good Shepherd.

I don't think she ever said an unkind word to anyone, though when she encountered attitudes or actions that were hurtful or unchristian, she would challenge them in her clear, loving way. In a way that left you feeling good about being corrected. She was able to do this without pretense or judgement.

When Anthony was released from jail, he really wanted to turn his life around, and so he started coming to church regularly. He found his way into Anita's pew and sat next to her, hoping, perhaps, that some of her holiness would spill over onto him.

The first Sunday Anthony was back, he came forward for communion and was kneeling next to Anita at the rail as I came along with the bread. I paused and looked at the two of them shoulder to shoulder, hands outstretched to receive the bread of life, and I thought: "what a picture, the convicted felon and the living saint side by side, together, hungry for a taste of new life. There's a glimpse of the kingdom of God."

Community. God's flock hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd and following Him in the way that leads to new and abundant life- The Way of Love.

Community. Those early believers gathered together to break the bread, to heal, to share what they had, to care for the needy.

Community. What we rely on when the storms of life set in.

Community. Where the needy, hungry and dispossessed know that they are Beloved, cherished children of God, and where the rejected are accepted.

Community. Our gathering together to build the Kingdom of Love here on earth as it is in heaven. Reaching out with compassion, kindness and understanding to help to heal the world with love and to build up the Body of Christ.

Community is powerful. Let us give thanks and praise for it.

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