**“Shepherd and Overseer”**

Acts 2:42-47

1 Peter 2:19-25

John 10:1-10

Easter 4

From 1st Peter: “He (Jesus) Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that **we might** die to sin and live to righteousness. **By His wounds you have been healed**. For you **were** straying like sheep, but **have now** returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Bridge**

If you have not yet seen Columbia’s Mule Day Parade, do go sometime. I went again a few weeks back, and hundreds of mules both ridden and, most, pulling buggies follow one after another. Kami caught, also, the “mule-train” riding into town earlier in the week: dozens coming into in a row and from the same direction, headed for the week’s festival and their place in the parade.

As impressive **mules** are to see doing their thing, I’m remembering a flock of sheep in that Mule Day Parade for a couple of the years sometime back. They were most memorable. Mule drivers use reigns and bits to guide one or several mules. Shepherds, though, have no leashes for dozens and yet keeping collected and guiding their sheep in flawless and impressive ways. There are leashes for **children** these days (ever seen a kindergarten teacher taking students on a field trip?), but dozens of sheep assuming their place together in the middle of a road in Columbia and moving appropriately in their turn in a parade, gathered into a tightly moving group from the start to the finish of this event, that was a sight to behold.

Key to that was always the **master** and **shepherd**. He, you knew (but only behind the scenes) could gather a flock and move the whole bunch with **just words**. In this case though, he made use of an “**undershepherd**”, or **herding, dog**. And you can go online on Youtube to see competitions of herding dogs with flocks (even “mobs” or large “bands” of sheep in a group), corralled and moved about by the skill of an **overseeing dog** and **the voice of a very familiar care-taking shepherd**.

**Text**

**This “figure of speech”** Jesus used for Himself and those who’d know **His voice / His Words** in a crowd … and **follow Him**, separating from masses to get next to the Master, herded by appropriate “overseers” and “under-shepherds” for a local touch, yet always under the **overseeing of a caring Master**. His voice His own sheep crave. Some masters one might **run away from** (task-masters most), but One Shepherd not only was willing to **die to save sheep**, but also **individually know them**. And **sheep who know that they’re sheep and want that One to oversee them and hold them and talk to them and rest them (with Him) safe and healthy places, nourishing them and making them really restful and headed not to slaughter but, maybe just, periodic hair cuts embracing this One, running to Him and quickly returning after some venturing, but wanting (and knowing how to gain) daily contact with weekly high points, Jesus is the Shepherd (Good) and the “Door of access to a pasture” called Heaven and Heaven’s hint on earth … and He's the Overseer over all overseers**. This is no place for then a, quote, “**self-made-thinking” man and woman**. This is where “**sheep**” are who **relish that identification … and admit to it**.

I know **such “self-made-thinking” people**. Some admit to a submission to **earthly masters** / to heroes that they respect or to things like money or power or acquisitions, but few admit to being overly “**overseen**” by anything. Drug or alcohol addictions (or even addictive personalities directing submission to things or games or work and busyness rather than people or substances), still self-made people tend toward being **corrupt by their self-making** (or, certainly, scathed in their thinking and, more often than not, arrogant and inappropriate and, not Godly in letting the Lord’s voice rule over their own).

And there’s, also, the **apathetic**. One of my favorite words about passing time is “**traipse**” and it, usually, means wandering-about in exploring alone or with select company who are similarly minded, and sheep are allowed **some latitude**. The word “apostle” means “one **sent**” and we’re to “live **in** the world but not be **of it**”, and in our Gospel reading, Jesus says that “if anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will **go in and out and find pasture**”, so **moments** **out in** the world are **duty** **remembering that home is in Jesus’ flock of a kingdom**, maybe even **bringing others with you** to the pasture that’s Good to find appropriate rest and really Good food and the introduction of others to the voice of the Lord. That’s **duty of course**, but **“straying like sheep” is laziness and immaturity, and not returning to the flock is what Jesus warns against**.

The rest is Great News though for all who know **their sheepishness** and **continue in the intimate acquaintance with Jesus as Shepherd and Good access point or “door”** to the Father’s grace. Jesus who bore our sins to the cross. Our baptism into Him and that and our love of all of that is who He moves followers in faith to the new context Jesus calls His flock (us His sheep, Him our Shepherd where we love hearing and knowing well His voice).

**Application**

Jesus **gives us this “figure of speech” so that we can picture it (visualize it) and love it and live in it … practicing our “His sheep” role religiously**. If you wonder how sheep with the right shepherd relate **Him to them** **/ them to Him**, then hear and picture it as your walk with Jesus:

“In selecting pasture for the flock, it’s an absolute necessity that plenty of water is provided there. Flocks often are stationed near a stream of running water, yet the sheep can be afraid of water that is running too quickly or that is riled up with mud. So the shepherd looks for **pools** of water that provide a **quiet place** where the sheep can quench their thirst.

“More than one flock may exist in the same fold or temporary location. Often flocks are even **mixed while being watered at the well**. No attempt is made to separate them **then**. **When it is** **time to separate the sheep**, one shepherd after another stands up and calls out to them in a **familiar way**. The sheep **lift their heads**, and after a scramble each one **begins following his master**.

“A good shepherd has a **personal relationship with his sheep**. Not only does the shepherd **know his sheep by name**, he **never drives them, but leads them instead**. This does not mean that he is always in front of them. He **may walk by their side** or sometimes **follow behind**.

“The shepherd is **so acutely aware of each of his sheep** that often he doesn’t even need to **count them**. He is able to **feel** the absence of any one of his sheep. When a shepherd was once asked how he could keep track of his sheep if he didn’t count, he replied, ‘If you were to put a cloth over my eyes and bring me any sheep and only let me **put hands on its face**, I could **tell in a moment if it was mine or not**.

“The shepherd **plays with his sheep to pass the hours**. A shepherd does this by **pretending to run away** **(being briefly out of sight)**. The sheep will soon **overtake him and surround him, jumping and twisting with delight**. The sheep **know their shepherd will not leave them nor turn them away**.”

**We** are called to “live **in** this world, but not be **OF** it”. The first believers found home as quickly as they believed with each other, but dealt **in** the world. **For the sake of the world**, **we’re to** bear witness collectively and personally to sheep of secular folds and tell them that the eternal Shepherd wants to shepherd them also into eternity, so there’s mostly that (the gathering of sheep for Jesus flock). Yet we’re to **remain ear- and eye-shot from Jesus, our Shepherd**. We’re to be His (and obviously so), showing that **at His** **beacon call** we run His way and gather around where He loves us by His Words into our ears and Sacrament of food and nourishment into our mouths. **For our sake (and our children’s)** we’re to **let Him play with us to pass our hours**, always **meditating within the sound of His voice** (hearing it / listening to it from the **rhythm** of a first-of-the-week Divine Service and, then, taking those Words home and re-reading them and memorizing the “just” of them, testing them within the contexts of our weekdays). We are to **never miss** a weekly “main Meal” and **never miss** those Words explained from a faithful pulpit. We’re to **never miss** being “wool-to-wool” close-to and touching other sheep **exercising themselves in the same relationship, “encouraging” them and there also to show ourselves with them and close to the Lord Jesus**.

May **our religion** be **this one** … under and in the daily care of **this One, Jesus**. And **He’s alive to Shepherd and Oversee us**. **Christ is** risen! **He** is risen, indeed! Alleluia! In **+His** name, Amen.