

The Fourth Week of Easter – April 27-May 1, 2026 Good Shepherd Sunday

Monday of the Fourth Week of Easter – Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, merciful Father, since You have wakened from death the Shepherd of Your sheep, grant us Your Holy Spirit that when we hear the voice of our Shepherd we may know Him who calls us each by name and follow where He leads; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Have you ever wondered what Jesus is doing now? He rose from the dead nearly two thousand years ago. What has he been up to? Sitting on a throne listening to angelic top 40 tunes? Is he deeply immersed in the administration of heaven's bureaucracy? Neither of those options seems appropriate. But what do we imagine that he is doing?

This prayer assumes we know the answer. Jesus has risen from the dead to be your shepherd today. He is the first fruit of those who will rise, but he rose so long before the rest of us because right now he has something to do. He has risen from the dead in order to take care of you. Too often, I think we imagine Jesus ascended into heaven and sat down upon its throne. And stays there. Our prayers become a long-distance call. But read again the accounts of Jesus appearing to his disciples. They were in a room, afraid. They were walking on a road despondent. They were weeping beside a tomb. Jesus showed up in the daily and difficult moments of real lives.

While I was studying for my PhD in St. Andrews, Scotland, I started attending the church where John Knox, the founder of Presbyterianism had preached. It was an historic spot and the nearest Lutheran parish was many miles away. The preacher was good, but there was something missing. I realized it quickly. The parish only celebrated the Lord's Supper once a quarter. I learned that I needed that. I found my way to the Episcopal church of Scotland which celebrated weekly. There I met Ken and Eric and others and was soon welcomed as a regular guest. I think I was really led to that place. I still think of it as another place to call "home."

Jesus was looking out for me there, in my days of stress and hard word. He had a place of respite and nurture. I needed that.

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Easter - Acts 2:40-47

⁴⁰ And with many other words (Peter) bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings

and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

A number of years ago we received a new member of the science faculty at Concordia University. He was coming from the faculty of a large state school, and, in that first semester of his teaching, he had some things which required his attention at his previous school. These duties conflicted with his lectures at Concordia. He approached the head of the department in a meeting of his department peers and asked what he should do. The department head turned to the rest of the science faculty and they all simply volunteered to teach his classes that day when he needed to be away. Sometime later that faculty member admitted to me that he had been overwhelmed by what they did that day. He said such a thing would never have happened in the hyper-competitive environment of his previous school. He could not believe that people would cheerfully and willingly do this for him. He said he felt the presence of Christ in that room.

The outpouring the Spirit on that first Pentecost had a profound impact on the people who were baptized. They had all things in common. They gave as any had need. Paul speaks of it as being called out of darkness and into the light, a new life which is lived according to the gracious principle of Christ and not the death-dealing principle of the world.

The Good Shepherd leads you into paths of righteousness for his name's sake. In days of pandemic, when it seems that the world is turned upside-down, a simple act of kindness, warmth, generosity, and gentleness can go far. Look for someone who needs that deed today. The Lord is still adding to that number.

Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Easter - Psalm 23

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

³ He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.
⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.

I remember a day many years ago, when I was anxious. I cannot even remember very well what I was anxious about. But I remember what happened quite clearly. A man whose name I knew, but otherwise he was a stranger to me, sat down beside me rather unexpectedly and started talking. I suppose he could tell I was anxious, but he asked how I was doing and teased out of me some of what I was anxious about. With calm and steady precision, he helped me back up, take a look at the larger picture, pointed out more than one flaw in my thinking, and brought to the surface things I had never considered before.

I do not think that conversation was an accident that day. Jesus, my Shepherd, was leading me to still waters and green pastures in this older Christian's wisdom and gentle kindness. There was no miracle nor anything supernatural about it. I and this man had crossed paths before and did so regularly. But never had we spoken like this. Why did he choose to sit by me that day? Why did his question pull out of me a confessed anxiety of which I had hardly spoken to anyone else? Others had asked how I was doing. I had responded with some version of "OK." There was no discernable cause which makes sense of this conversation that way. But as I reflect on it, its cause seems clear. The Jesus who had promised on the day of my Baptism to watch over my coming in and going out was keeping that promise.

The words of the Psalm have been precious to God's people for 3,000 years. This is likely one of the oldest poems you will ever read. It is older than the Iliad and the Odyssey. It was old when Jesus helped us to see that it was talking about him. Its durability is found in the comfort it still brings. Read it slowly and think about the ways that your resurrected Lord has done all these things for you. Read it again. This time think of how Jesus could use you to be calm waters or an overflowing cup for someone in your life.

Thursday of the Fourth Week of Easter - I Peter 2:13-25

¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

¹⁸ Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. ¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures

sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He 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. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

If you read yesterday's devotional, you might remember that the Shepherding Lord accompanies the psalmist and us through the valley of the shadow of death. I would rather skip that valley, go around on the sunny slopes of the hills of happiness and the broad plains of success. But my path does not lead that way. Sometimes life gets tough.

Peter speaks to people who are being persecuted and asking the "why me?!" questions which naturally pop up when life gets gritty and tough. He has some interesting things to say about following the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. Sometimes it means that we suffer for doing good. If we sin and are punished, that is justice. But if we do good, suffer for it, and endure, this is a "gracious" thing in God's sight. Why is it gracious? Because, when we suffer like that, we look a little like Jesus. That is the way he suffered. Our lives strangely look a little like his.

I need to hear that. It is too easy for me to stray into a way of life which sees suffering only as the evil which must be avoided at all costs, even if it means compromising my humanity by lashing out, lying, or some other means. But now he has risen from the dead, the living body that was crucified so that we might be returned to that true Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. In being that Shepherd, he has redefined suffering for us. Peter never asks us to enjoy suffering. But he does ask us to think about it anew, as a vocation through which God has saved the world. It is not an occasion to lash out or compromise our faith. We won't need to put ourselves first and hoard the latest scarce commodity. We can entrust ourselves to the one who judges justly. He has holes in his hands and his feet, the marks of his death for our sins. We have no fear of that judgment but only a love which allows us to be patient and kind.

Friday of the Fourth Week of Easter - John 10: 1-10

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

⁶ This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷ So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

Sheep are funny animals. We often think of them as not being very intelligent and somewhat foolish. The movie *Babe* did not do much for the image of sheep. A shepherd will tell you that sheep are not stupid animals as far as barnyard animals go. But sheep do have a problem. They cannot see very well. Their hearing, however, is quite good. They appear foolish to us. They cannot see that gate is open, so they won't go through it. The shepherd must take one of them and walk it through while calling the rest to follow. The sheep can discern his voice and they will follow him.

This passage used to bother me. I wondered how I should recognize Jesus' voice. I had not heard him preach like those first Christians. But Jesus smiled upon my naivete. Little did I know that I was hearing the rich voice of my Savior in all the voices who spoke to me of Him. My mother and father were the first ones, teachers, friends, colleagues, spouse, and even my children sometimes serve Him this way. I know his voice.

John says that the disciples did not understand Jesus' figure of speech. Were they dense? This is not hard. No, they had not received the Spirit yet. This makes no sense without the Spirit. You have been blessed with that Spirit. Hear and understand these words. Your Shepherd risen from the dead calls you now and on the last day, and whether you are still alive or have died before his coming, you will hear that voice and follow him, as you follow him now. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has risen from the dead that he might tend you, His flock. Therefore, have no fear, little flock. In Christ the Father has chosen to give you the kingdom. He keeps you in his love forever and stoops down to heal you, uplift you, and restore you. He stays close beside you. (LSB #735)