



The Lord is My Shepherd But We are Much More than Sheep

A sermon by the Rev. Susan Bek
4th Sunday of Easter, Year C
Mother's Day, May 12, 2019

The Lord is my Shepherd.

He is the one I follow. He cares for me and protects me. He sees to my needs and watches over me. He understands more than I do about where we're going and why we're on this journey. Yet, often I strike out on my own forgetting that I need him. And what does he do? He lets me go, and waits; still watching, still caring. And after I get into trouble and find myself lost, he finds me and brings me back into the fold.

The Lord is my Shepherd.

He is always there. Sometimes I face him, look right at him, recognize him. Sometimes I look away pretending that all that I have and all that I can do are to my own credit. I am so distracted by the ways of the world that I forget my shepherd...until I find myself lost again and he comes to find me and bring me back into the fold.

The Lord is my Shepherd.

Sometimes life is challenging, overwhelming, hard to bear. Sometimes I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I find myself there when I am ill. I find myself there when I am grieving. I find myself there when I am beaten down by the losses, by the fears, by the overwhelming sense that I am but a speck upon a speck upon a speck in the vast universe around me. I find myself there every time there is another act of violence, every time a school or mosque or church or concert or night club erupts becomes a place of horror and violence. When hopelessness sometimes sets in, and I am lost again, and so he comes to find me and bring me back into the fold.

The Lord is my Shepherd.

In spite of it all, I have nothing to fear for the Lord is with me. He leads and guides me, he cares for me and all this flock and every flock. We journey on in safety because he is ever-present. And, because he loves us and claims us as his own, he will watch over us in this world and guide us into the next where we shall live in the house of the Lord forever.

Today is the fourth Sunday of Easter. On this day, we continue our celebration of the Resurrection and we remember Jesus as the Good Shepherd. It is also Mother's Day. And as a mother, there's something more I need to say today. As wonderful as the image of the metaphor of the sheep and the Good Shepherd is, it can only take us so far. We are the sheep AND we are much more than just sheep.

Sheep do not have to be aware of what's happening beyond the field in which they graze. Sheep do not have the responsibility to reach out to others, to stand up for justice or to serve as models of how one can live a good and full life while respecting the dignity of every human being.

We are like sheep, but we've also been made in the image of the one, almighty, Creator. We have been called, instructed and redeemed by the Savior and we are, each one of us, every day, every minute, every second of our lives empowered, inspired and led by the Spirit.

We are called to do more than just graze in the field. We are to be the peacemakers, the hope-bearers, the life-givers.

There are plenty of times during which we are invited to sit back to learn and grow, nurtured by scripture, by the church and by the wonderful fellowship we enjoy with one another. But, when the time comes, when darkness closes in, we are to stand up armed with love, with reckless compassion and radical inclusion to teach the world what Jesus taught us – how to love one another as he loves us.

At clergy conference last week, Bishop Taylor said about the Episcopal Church, “Now is our time.” He called us to stand up and get to work.

Why now? Because people are losing hope, some are becoming numb to news of injustices that trouble the heart of God and bring indescribable pain to our fellow siblings, the beloved of God.

Why us? Because the Episcopal Church has what the world so desperately needs. We understand inclusion, we understand compassion, we understand love. We know how to walk the *via media*, the middle way, and speak the language of hope and acceptance that people on all sides of an issue can understand.

As Episcopalians, we also know how to take a stand. We know how to brave the currents of unpopular positions while culture catches up and day by day we become more like the people God intends for us to be. We are to stand up and lead. We are to summon the courage Jesus modeled for us and speak the truth in love. We need to be the light that helps to dispel the darkness.

There are many issues around which the church is rallying people, taking a stand and acting in faith. I’ll highlight one of them today. In honor of the mothers, this Mother’s Day, I call your attention to the problem of violence.

Have you ever heard of *Bishops United Against Gun Violence*? It’s a group of more than 80 Episcopal Bishops (including our own). They’ve issued this statement, “We will no longer be silent while violence permeates our world, our society, our Church, our homes and ourselves. Our faith calls us to be ministers of reconciliation, to give voice to the voiceless and to strive for justice in the name of our Lord.”

Together with the group, *Episcopalians United Against Gun Violence*, they work to curtail this epidemic that is spreading darkness, endangering children, targeting the innocent and terrifying us all.

“We believe in a God of life who calls our church to speak and act decisively against the unholy trinity of poverty, racism and violence,” and, “To these urgent tasks, we offer particular gifts of our church—its long experience in crafting moving ritual; its devotion to providing pastoral care to those in duress; its history of reasoning theologically about contemporary concerns; and its willingness to follow Jesus in speaking truth, especially when truth is out of season.”

On their website, and at their rallies, they list the very real ways they are taking action in order to make a difference. There are copies of this sermon and further information about this issue available in the narthex (lobby), and I’ll put some further information in this week’s email newsletter for you.

Before I sit down, I’d like to add my voice to all those who have called for an end to the violence. The past 30 days have seen far too many incidents, heard far too many screams and wiped away far too many tears.

Today, on Mother’s Day, for the sake of the mothers, and the children and all our siblings in the great Creator whose image we bear, I ask you to join me in prayer.

God of peace, we lift prayers all those who have died in incidents of gun violence remembering especially some of the incidents of the past 30 days.

Fifty-one lives cut short at a mosque in Christ Church, New Zealand.

Give to the departed eternal rest.

Let light perpetual shine upon them.

A life cut short at Chabad of Poway Synagogue near San Diego – 60 year old Lori Gilbert Kaye.

Give to the departed eternal rest.

Let light perpetual shine upon them.

Two lives cut short at the University of North Carolina, in Charlotte – 19 year old Ellis Parlier and 21-year-old Riley Howell.

Give to the departed eternal rest.

Let light perpetual shine upon them.

Another life cut short at STEM High School in Highland's Ranch, Colorado – 18 year old Kendrick Castillo.

Give to the departed eternal rest.

Let light perpetual shine upon them.

For all who have died in any incident of violence.

Give to the departed eternal rest.

Let light perpetual shine upon them.

For survivors of violence.

Grant them comfort and healing.

Hear us, Lord.

For those who have lost loved ones to violence.

Grant them peace.

Hear us, Lord.

For the many first responders who put their own lives in danger.

Protect and strengthen them.

Hear us, Lord.

For families, friends, chaplains, therapists and all who support and comfort those who have been terrified.

Fill them with the strength to carry on.

Hear us, Lord.

And, for those in whom violence is, this day, rising up.

Inspire us to help them before it's too late.

Hear us, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

*May all who have died, rest in peace,
and may all who remain, be stirred to action.*

In the name of the Creator, and of the Savior, and of the Holy Spirit who sustains us all.

Amen.

BISHOPS UNITED AGAINST GUN VIOLENCE

Bishops United Against Gun Violence is a group of [more than 80 Episcopal bishops](#) working to curtail the epidemic of gun violence in the United States.

We believe in a God of life in the face of death who calls our church to speak and act decisively against the unholy trinity of poverty, racism and violence. In the struggle against these evils, our group offers four contributions:

- [public liturgy](#) including processions, vigils and prayers services to commemorate the dead and inspire the living
- spiritual support for those living with gunshot wounds, with grief, with fear and with the temptation of hopelessness, and advocacy for broader and easier access to mental health services for those at risk of suicide
- sound teaching for those yearning to bring an ethic of Christian compassion and concern for the common good to bear on debates regarding unjust economic and legal structures, public safety, individual rights and our responsibilities to one another as children of God
- [persistent advocacy](#) for common sense gun safety measures that enjoy the support of gun owners and non-gun owners alike, such as
 - handgun purchaser licensing
 - background checks on all gun purchasers
 - restrictions on gun ownership by domestic abusers
 - classification of gun trafficking as a federal crime
 - encouragement for the development of “smart gun” technology
 - federal funding for research into gun violence prevention strategies
 - safe storage of firearms

If the movement to curtail gun violence and promote public safety is to succeed, we must call people of good will together under a common banner. We must create experiences through which grief, fear, rage and despair can be transformed into patient and hopeful resolve. We must ground our arguments in an ethic of shared responsibility, support them with clear logic and credible data, and articulate them with charity to those with whom we disagree. And we must be willing to continue speaking when it seems our words make no difference.

To these urgent tasks, we offer particular gifts of our church—its long experience in crafting moving ritual; its devotion to providing pastoral care to those in duress; its history of reasoning theologically about contemporary concerns; and its willingness to follow Jesus in speaking truth, especially when truth is out of season.