

**Hybrid Worship for April 30, 2023
Fourth Sunday of Easter**

Territorial Acknowledgment and Announcements

We acknowledge that the land on which we gather is situated upon traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron - Wyandot, the Haudenosaunee and later the Mississauga of the Credit First Nations. The territory is mutually covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibway and other allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

Today, this remains the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in their community, and to share and respect Mother Earth.

Centering Music: "Open Our Hearts" MV 21

Open our hearts, open our minds.
Open our lives to you O loving God.
Open our hearts, open our minds.
Open our lives to you O loving God.

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer

One: Come, says God, and be my people.

All: At worship, at play, at work, we are God's beloved.

One: Come, says God, and care for one another.

All: At home, at church, in our communities, we share what we have.

One: Come, says God, and hear my voice.

All: In scripture, in stories, in our lives, we listen for God.

One: Come, says Jesus, and let me shepherd you.

**All: In happy times, in concerning times, at all times
Jesus is the Way and the Truth.**

One: Come, beloved people of God, and worship.

All: We open our minds and hearts to God and one another.

One: Let us pray with one voice:

**All: Sacred Source of life abundant,
we come to this time of worship
as your people have come throughout history:
questioning and replying,
searching and finding,
hurting and healing,
lost and found.**

**Be with us as we journey with you in this brief time,
remind us that you are with us in all life's moments,
and wish for us a life abundant.**

**We pray in the name of the One who provides that life –
Jesus the teacher, the companion, the saviour.
Amen**

Opening Hymn: “Come In, Come In and Sit Down” VU 395

Come in, come in and sit down,
you are a part of the family.
We are lost and we are found,
and we are a part of the family.

You know the reason why you came,
yet no reason can explain;
so share in the laughter and cry in the pain,
for we are a part of the family.

Come in, come in and sit down,
you are a part of the family.
We are lost and we are found,
and we are a part of the family.

God is with us in this place,
like a mother's warm embrace.
We're all forgiven by God's grace,
for we are a part of the family.

Come in, come in and sit down,
you are a part of the family.
We are lost and we are found,
and we are a part of the family.

There's life to be shared in the bread and the wine;
we are the branches, Christ is the vine.
This is God's temple, it's not yours or mine,
but we are a part of the family.

Come in, come in and sit down,
you are a part of the family.
We are lost and we are found,
and we are a part of the family.

There's rest for the weary and health for us all;
there's a yoke that is easy, and a burden that's small.
So come in and worship and answer the call,
for we are a part of the family.

Come in, come in and sit down,
you are a part of the family.
We are lost and we are found,
and we are a part of the family.

Prayer for Reflection and Revelation: *“The Gate” by Dave Hopwood, adapted*

One: I am the gate, whoever comes through me will find life.
Others come to take and to steal,

All: I have come to bring you life, and life in abundance.

One: Others come to hurt and manipulate,

All: I have come to bring you life, and life in abundance.

One: Others come with fake news and alternative truth,

All: I have come to bring you life, and life in abundance.

One: Others will lead you down dark alleys and dead ends,

All: I have come to bring you life, and life in abundance.

One: Others come with their own distorted version of truth,

All: I have come to bring you life, and life in abundance.

One: Others come with their own twisted take on justice and compassion,

All: I have come to bring you life, and life in abundance.

One: Others come pedalling damaging lies and deceit,

All: I have come to bring you life, and life in abundance.

One: Others are only in it for themselves,

All: I have come to bring you life, and life in abundance.

One: I am the gate, whoever comes through me will find life.

Holy God, give us discerning hearts and minds,
give us the wisdom to know when you are speaking through
the voices and lives that surround us.
Forgive us when we cannot hear,
forgive us when we are distracted by other paths,
forgive us when we think only of what is best for us personally.
We know, deep within, that you ultimately offer
forgiveness and life in abundance.

Sung Response: *“And On This Path” MV 8*

And on this path, the gates of holiness are open wide,
and on this path, the gates of holiness are open wide,

and on this path, the gates of holiness are open wide!

Open wide! Open wide! Open wide!
The gates are open wide!

So enter in, the gates of holiness are open wide,
so enter in, the gates of holiness are open wide,
so enter in, the gates of holiness are open wide,

Open wide! Open wide! Open wide!
The gates are open wide!

Scripture Readings:

Acts 2:42–47 *The Inclusive Bible*

They devoted themselves to the apostles' instructions and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. A reverent fear overtook them all, for many wonders and signs were being performed by the apostles. Those who believed lived together, shared all things in common; they would sell their property and goods, sharing the proceeds with one another as each had need. They met in the Temple and they broke bread together in their homes every day. With joyful and sincere hearts they took their meals in common, praising God and winning the approval of the people. Day by day, God added to their number those who were being saved.

Psalm 23 *A musical offering*

John 10:1-10 *The Inclusive Bible*

The truth of the matter is,
whoever doesn't enter the sheepfold
through the gate
but climbs in some other way
is a thief and a robber.
The one who enters through the gate
is the shepherd of the sheep,
the one for whom the keeper opens the gate.
The sheep know the shepherds voice;
the shepherd calls them by name
and leads them out.
Having led them all out of the fold,
the shepherd walks in front of them
and they follow
because they recognize the shepherd's voice.
They simply won't follow strangers –
they'll flee from them

because they don't recognize the voice of strangers.

Even though Jesus used this metaphor with them, they didn't grasp what he was trying to tell them. He therefore said to them again:

the truth of the matter is,
I am the sheep gate.
All who came before me
were thieves and marauders
whom the sheep didn't heed.
I am the gate.
Whoever enters through me will be safe –
you'll go and out and find pasture.
The thief comes only to steal
and slaughter and destroy.
I came that you might have life,
and have it abundantly.

One: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

All: **Thanks be to God.**

Choir: "He Is the Rock"

Reflection: Sheep, gates, and life abundant

Hymn: "We Cannot Own the Sunlit Sky" MV 143

We cannot own the sunlit sky, the moon, the wildflow'rs growing.
for we are part of all that is within life's river flowing.
With open hands receive and share the gifts of God's creation,
that all may have abundant life in ev'ry earthly nation.

When bodies shiver in the night and the weary, wait for morning,
when children have no bread but tears, and warhorns sound their warning,
god calls humanity to wake, to join in common labour,
that all may have abundant life in oneness with their neighbour.

God calls humanity to join as partners in creating
a future free from want or fear, life's goodness celebrating,
that new world beckons from afar, invites our shared endeavour,
that all may have abundant life and peace endure forever.

Introduction to the Offering

Gift of Music

Hymn of Dedication: “Know That God is Good” MV 104

Know that God is good,
know that God is good,
know that God is good,
God is good, God is good.

Offering Prayer:

**All: Holy God, you call us to lives of generosity and sharing,
compassion and caring for the most vulnerable.
Accept and bless all that we bring,
so that your life abundant may be known and lived
by all people everywhere. Amen**

Prayers of the People

O God, our Source of Life abundant,
you come to us with the strength and love of a parent,
and the tender mercies, patience and protection of a loving shepherd.
We see you in the lives of those around us,
we see you in the greening of fields and trees,
we find you in the chilly spring dawn and the nourishing rain,
in words of tenderness shared and in words of praise lifted.
Thank you for your gifts of love, of connection, and of community.

Hear us, Loving God,
as we lift to you our prayers for others and for ourselves.

We pray for those in need—those who hunger or are homeless.
We pray for those in pain—the abused, the broken-hearted, the lonely.
We pray for the sick in body or spirit or mind, and for those who grieve.
We pray for those who live in fear, and those who seek to help and shelter them.
We pray for those on the margins, and those who are allies to them.

We pray that your loving kindness and justice would be known
through our own hands, our words, our deeds, our hearts.
In our ordinary and extraordinary lives,
in our simple and complicated living,
make us instruments of your peace and grace
in weary days with weary people.

In silence, we share with you our deepest worries and concerns.

Gather our prayers, God, like the shepherd who gathers their flock.
Hear our prayers, God – you who know our voices.
We lift those voices to you now as we share the words that Jesus taught us to say –

The Lord's Prayer (sung) VU 959

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
deliver us from evil
for the kingdom, the power and glory are yours,
now and forever.

Closing Hymn: “Who is My Mother” MV 178

Who is my mother, who is my brother?
All those who gather round Jesus Christ:
Spirit blown people born from the Gospel
sit at the table, round Jesus Christ.

Differently abled, differently labeled,
widen the circle round Jesus Christ:
crutches and stigmas, culture's enigmas,
all come together round Jesus Christ.

Love will relate us colour or status
can't segregate us, round Jesus Christ:
family failings, human derailings
all are accepted round Jesus Christ.

Bound by one vision, met for one mission
we claim each other, round Jesus Christ:
here is my mother, here is my brother,
kindred in spirit, through Jesus Christ.

Commissioning /Blessing

Sing Amen VU431

Rev. Joanne's Reflection

I don't know about you, but I don't very often feel like a sheep. As I matter of fact I have very little real-life experience with sheep or with shepherds. While I have visited some modern sheep farms, and knew sheep farmers as part of the communities I served when I first began ordered ministry, there is still a pretty big gap in my sheep and shepherding knowledge. So images of God as shepherd from Psalm 23 and from John's scripture do not necessarily resonate with me.

I probably have a pretty stereotypical view of sheep: they are cute and fluffy, they are docile and need shepherding, and they aren't very smart. After a bit of research, I discovered that in fact sheep are fairly intelligent animals; they can recognize both the faces of other sheep and humans, and voices. They will run from what scares them, but try to stay together for safety. They can see behind themselves without turning their heads, and apparently have excellent sight and hearing. No doubt Jesus, when he speaks of sheep and shepherds in the passage we heard from John, knows a thing or two about sheep, and expects that his audience would have had some of that same knowledge.

Sheep were in integral part of first century life, providing food and fabric, as they had been throughout the history of the Israelite people. Those to whom Jesus was speaking – the Pharisees and his followers, would also have been familiar with the story of Moses being given Joshua son of Nun as a leader to the people, so that they would not wander "like sheep without a shepherd." Certainly the leaders in the crowd would have known the many psalms that contained imagery of the people as sheep of God's pasture, knowing too that King David himself had been a shepherd to his father's flocks. The prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel use the image of the Israel as a lost sheep with no shepherd, scattered and in Ezekiel particularly God declares that God will be the shepherd and care for and gather the sheep.

When Jesus continues those same images, he does so with a twist. Yes, the people are still sheep, deserving of guidance and protection, an essential part of the fabric of God's kin-dom, worthy of care and attention. God is shepherd; those who would distract or attack the people are like thieves and robbers. Jesus, surprisingly, places himself in the role of the sheep-gate, the way into God's care, the portal to God's shepherding.

Gates – although perhaps not sheep gates, are much more part of my life experience. There are many kinds of those I know about: Baby gates, parking gates, security gates, doorways and barriers, sometimes meant to keep people in, sometimes meant to keep people out. I remember vividly the number of 'gates' I had to walk through when I worked at the Vanier Centre for Women Correctional Facility as a student Chaplain. Those gates were definitely in place to control and separate. Most of the gates we encounter today need some kind of code, or perhaps the payment of a fee, in order to open.

Even in Jesus' time, gates were meant to enclose or exclude, to be barriers between people or animals. So what does Jesus mean when he says he is the gate? The church has, throughout time, used this passage to exclude others. If Jesus is the gate, then the church must be the "fence" on which the gate hangs in the world, so anyone who thought differently would be 'fenced' – kept from full membership in the church's life. I would suggest that Jesus as gate means a gate that is open, a gate that instead of being a barrier is an invitation, an invitation to abundant life. Yes, the gate – the way of Jesus, of compassion and healing and inclusion, can protect, and is perhaps a barrier for those who cannot see what he brings.

Jesus had actually just healed the man born blind, before this teaching in John's gospel. The Pharisees had thoroughly investigated that incident, and some were standing close by when Jesus encounters the

now-sighted man once more. They call out to Jesus, asking him if he is calling them blind. He responds with words that seem to comment that they see without understanding, and remain separate from God's way. He continues with this imagery of sheep and gates and God and life abundant.

Ultimately, what can these images do to reveal Jesus for us today? How do they lead us to understand God's way for us, or take us into deeper relationship with God? Do we all need courses in sheep-rearing to understand Jesus? Do we need to feel like sheep to be God's people?

We might remember that sheep were valued and valuable in Jesus' world. That we are valued and valuable in God's eyes. That Jesus is the open gate – that he states later in this teaching that he is not only that open way, he is the good Shepherd, willing to lay down his life for the sheep like an ancient shepherd who would lay across the entrance to the sheepfold to keep danger away. He also tells those listening that he has other sheep – not only the ones that are part of this fold, and that he will lead them, too. Lead them to life abundant, lead them to understand God's way, if they will recognize his voice.

We do not need to be like sheep, we need to be like Jesus. We can be and create open 'gates' where all are valued and welcomed, just as Jesus valued women, and the blind, and the sick, and the tormented. We can offer protection to those who are vulnerable – not just in our churches, but in our society, through our actions and our allyship. We can stand up to those who would steal away dignity and worth from women, and trans women and men, from Indigenous children and elders, from refugees and from those experiencing poverty and scarcity. We can, in the course of our work, experience even more abundant life when it is shared, like those in the early church who shared with one another and lived in common for the good of all.

When we need to, we can rest in the care of both God the shepherd and Jesus our way and good shepherd. When we need refreshment and care, we can lean on the inclusive and open love of God given to us in Jesus, knowing that God calls us, knowing that Jesus can lead us, knowing that abundant life as God's people is there for us. Amen