

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year B

THE GOOD SHEPHERD IS LOVE

1 John 3:16-24

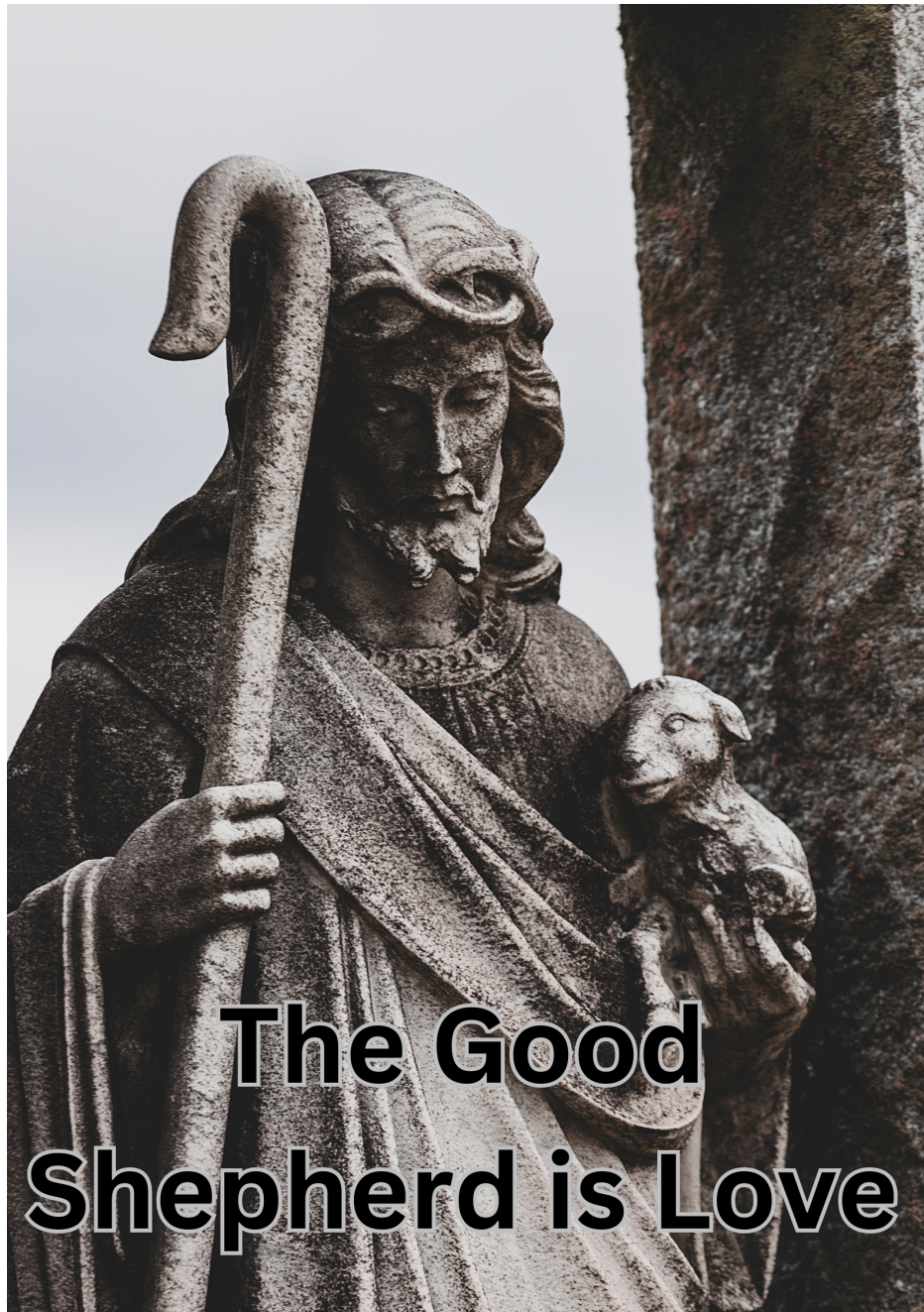
Fourth Sunday of Easter

Analysis by Mark A Marius

16 We know love by this, that [Jesus Christ] laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 17 How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. 19 And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him 20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; 22 and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

23 And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. 24 All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.



The Good Shepherd is Love

From Canva

“God, full of compassion, decided to give us what we truly need – love in the person of Jesus Christ, the good shepherd who lays down his life for us.”

“Laying down his life for the sheep frees us to let go of our own lives in order to take up the lives of our neighbors.”

DIAGNOSIS: Not sharing the love we know

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): *Goods not living up to their name*

Goods: We all have some goods. We all desire goods – more goods, better goods. But so often our goods are not for the common good. They are pursued and procured for our own benefit, for our own lives. Once we are satisfied we may share the left overs or give them away when they no longer have value to us. But what about our responsibility to love those who suffer, lack resources, and are in desperate need of something good? Not sharing goods sounds bad, and void of love.

Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem): *Hearts not living up to our words about love*

We know how to say words that sound like love. We may utter, “love the sinner but not the sin,” without any loving action of welcome or compassion to support it. We know how to affirm our love for all of creation, yet we exploit it for our own purpose. We paint a nice picture with our lip service, but our actions betray us. Our hearts are not in our words. The truth we may affirm is betrayed by our deceitful actions and intent. Our trust is not in how our loving shepherd leads and provides. It’s in the comfort of our own pastures.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): *Not living at all*

God is greater than our hearts. Which means God has the power to condemn us and our hearts for not obeying God’s commandments. Living apart from God is not living at all.



PROGNOSIS: Loving us to share

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): *Jesus Christ is love in action*

God is greater than the deadly sin in our hearts. Which means that God has the power to change our hearts instead of condemning them as we deserve. And so God, full of compassion, decided to give us what we truly need – love in the person of Jesus Christ, the good shepherd who lays down his life for us. God resurrecting his Son to new life is an action through which we now know love.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): *Hearts full of the Holy Spirit*

Before we abide in God, the good Shepherd calls us, and in doing so gives us the Holy Spirit to abide in us – in our hearts. Filled with this Holy love our hearts receive the faith necessary to trust the Truth that is Christ. Our hearts now long for all the goods God gives – the gifts of grace, forgiveness, compassion.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): *Meeting needs is good*

New hearts are where loving action is born. Laying down his life for the sheep frees us to let go of our own lives in order take up the lives of our neighbors. God's command to love one another is good and possible when we follow the Good Shepherd's lead. The Love we know flows from our faith that is latching on to Christ's death and resurrection. The goods of the world are now reclassified as the means by which we care for others and creation. And when these means are coupled with God's grace it is reckoned as right and good. So we share the means of grace with the flock, those in our midst and even those who have wandered off. In fact the means are anything but mean, as the grace of God produces great joy in the care and redemption of all that God has made.

Easter Vigil / Easter Sunday

Jesus, the Gardener

John 20:1-18

Easter Vigil / Easter

Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

1Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. 2So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." 3Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10Then the disciples returned to their homes.

11But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." 14When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him

away." 16Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). 17Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' " 18Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.



Annibale Carracci – Holy Women at Christ's Tomb
<https://www.wga.hu/html/c/carracci/annibale/2/women.html>

The tomb and its stone may have foreshadowed only death, but the gardener has reclaimed Eden for God's beloved creatures. Mary is the first recipient: Jesus speaks her name, and plants hope in her that wipes away her tears and gives her new life.

DIAGNOSIS: We Water the Ground with Our Tears

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Death Comes to Us All

There's no escaping from death. Mary knew it when she approached Jesus' tomb. Dead is dead. When Jesus spoke those last words from the cross, nothing could have been truer about what finally becomes of life: "It is finished."

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Death Feels Personal

We shed tears for the deceased for a lot of reasons. In Mary's case, death for Jesus had been sudden, violent, and it marked the end of a very promising ministry. Mary not only lost her teacher who gave her hope, she lost a future that she anticipated by following him. What she gained was the trauma and shame of his violent political death, a corrupt religious institution, and the same heavy-handed empire she'd lived with all her life.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): We're Angry and Disillusioned

When you can't blame the powers-that-be because they will turn on you, and none of your community is willing to speak too loudly about the horror of your loss, the one place you might be inclined to turn is to God. The psalmists certainly didn't hesitate. Even Jesus, from the cross, used those words that speak of God's abandonment: why have you forsaken me? God was asking the same question of those who stood by when Jesus was

being crucified. He is asking that question of humanity still today.



Jesus resurrected and Mary Magdalene
<http://thebiblerevival.com/clipart27.htm>

PROGNOSIS: Jesus Brings New Life from the Soil We

Water

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Restoring the Garden

Such questions cannot keep the “green blade” from rising, though. Jesus, who anticipated both his death and his resurrection, vacates the tomb only to be mistaken for the gardener. What a lovely metaphor: God-incarnate tending to the garden by bringing about new life. The tomb and its stone may have foreshadowed only death, but the gardener has reclaimed Eden for God’s beloved creatures. Mary is the first recipient: Jesus speaks her name, and plants hope in her that wipes away her tears and gives her new life.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Cultivating New Fruit in Us

Each time we hear Jesus speak our names, in the Word, at the font and table, we are reclaimed for resurrection life in the here and now. Tending to our faith with his promises, Jesus plants us firmly back in God’s care. Weeping may come by night, but joy comes in the morning. But as much as we might like to cling to that joy, as Mary wanted to cling to Jesus, we know that our faith has places to go.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): New Fruit Produces Seeds Worth Planting

So we take the fruit of Christ’s resurrection planted in us, and spread it around. We meet people on this side of the grave, with the news of an open tomb, and a gentle gardener who meets us in our sorrow with resurrection joy. We might have our questions, still we turn toward our neighbors: we reach out to those experiencing the darkness of grief, the shadow of trauma, the loneliness of abandonment. We don’t have quick answers, but we

do have hope in a gardener who keeps stirring up the soil of our hearts, that we might grow under his care.