



'Worship at home' Sunday May 3 2020

Today we reflect on Christ as our Good Shepherd, in whom we find comfort, protection, and peace. **Light a candle** to remind you of Christ's presence and place it in a safe place.

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

John 10:10b (NRSV)

As we set this time aside for worship,
we are assured that
in dark valleys and high mountains,
in green pastures
and bushfire ravaged ruins,
by still waters and raging floods,
in times of struggle and fear
and times of peace and comfort,
in all the days of our lives
God's goodness and mercy are with us.
We are blessed with abundant life.



Catacomb of Callixtus - The Good Shepherd

from Art in the Christian Tradition,

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<http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=54382>

This Sunday is often referred to in the Church's liturgical year as Good Shepherd Sunday. Images such as this above have been used to portray Jesus as Good Shepherd for hundreds of years. This comes from the ceiling of a catacomb where the first Christians hid to worship God in fear of persecution from the Romans.

**Reflect on why the artist chose to paint Jesus
as a strong young shepherd.**

How might this be a helpful image for you today?

Psalm 23

God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing. You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from.

True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction.

Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I'm not afraid when you walk at my

side. Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure. You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies. You revive my drooping head; my cup brims with blessing.

Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life. I'm back home in the house of God for the rest of my life.

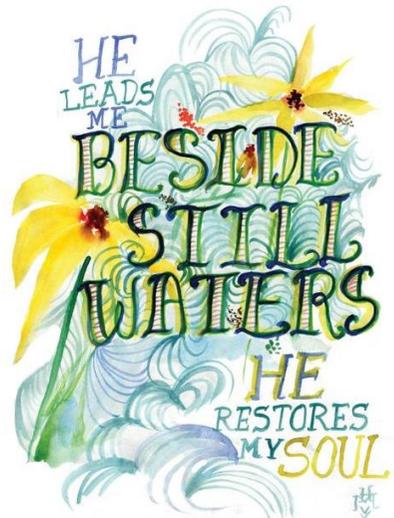
The Message

Reflect on the images of abundance you find in this scripture.

Give thanks for the ways in which you have experienced God's goodness and mercy in your life this week.

Currently, many of us are spending more time at home, with our regular activities curtailed, our workplaces restricted, our church buildings closed. Without the usual busy-ness of our lives, filled with activities and tasks from morning to late evening, we might find we have more time to think.

Some are finding this time of social restriction a time of restoration and renewal. A time to stop, to reflect, to pray. An opportunity to reassess what is important to us, and to establish relationships in new ways. A time to spend with God, and with ourselves. A time to catch our breath, and renew our strength.



Reflect on the following, written by Kitty O'Meara, a retired Irish-American teacher, in response to her personal anxiety over the Coronavirus pandemic:

And the people stayed home. And read books, and listened, and rested, and exercised, and made art, and played games, and learned new ways of being, and were still. And listened more deeply. Some meditated, some prayed, some danced. Some met their shadows. And the people began to think differently. And the people healed. And, in the absence of people living in ignorant, dangerous, mindless, and heartless ways, the earth began to heal.

And when the danger passed, and the people joined together again, they grieved their losses, and made new choices, and dreamed new images, and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully, as they had been healed.

Kitty O'Meara 2020

Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common.

They sold property and possessions to give to

anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

New International Version

This text invites us to examine again what is important in our Christian lives.



Reflect on the images of abundance you find in this scripture.

Response: In our individualistic culture, we so often focus on *our* possessions, *our* experiences, *our* rights. This image of the early Christian church reminds us of the importance of community, and we are challenged to lay aside our own rights and expectations for the needs of others, and the common good. This week, we have seen demonstrations in some countries against coronavirus restrictions, advocating the right for personal freedom. Health authorities have reacted strongly, imploring people to think of others in a continuing effort to “flatten the curve” so viral spread does not overwhelm.

We are encouraged to follow Christ’s example of generosity, sacrificial love and hospitality towards others. Abundant life is not about abundance of food or possessions or things we want. Abundant life is found in God’s overflowing love and grace, which fills our lives with goodness and mercy, and generously flows out to those around us. It is then that we, as individuals and as communities, flourish and find fulfillment.

In this time when we are unable to physically gather in fellowship and prayer, may we find new ways of responding to the work of the Holy Spirit who is never absent from our church, and be open to new opportunities to show generosity and hospitality with each other.



Prayer: God, in whom we find shepherding love, may we hear, follow and embody this love in all the days and in all the ways of our lives. May words and deeds joyfully testify to the abundance of your faithful love for us and for all. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit™

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Closing: As we come closer to a time when our social restrictions might be relaxed, make some time to consider:

- Which of your daily activities nourish you in life-giving ways? Which consume or drain you?
- What changes could you make in order to know God’s goodness and mercy more abundantly in your life?
- How might you show the abundance of God’s love to those around you?