Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year A

**Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23;**  John 10:1-10

**WELCOME**

***Grace and peace to you from United Protestant Church of Morgan Park, Duluth, MN—where we finally had the sweet taste of Spring in the air for a few days—down in Chamber’s Grove the Bloodroot are starting to appear—cutest little white flower with a leaf underneath that remains wrapped around the stem as if embracing or cradling the whole growing life.***

 ***--yeah, you’re right, maybe I do spend too much time alone in the woods, but… it’s gorgeous out there. And I know the weather’s changing—next week, so they say, a chill will return.***

***Just know it’s happening, friends. Even the birds have quieted down a great deal in early mornings… they’ve sung their hearts out and found their partners and are busy nesting now. Sitting on eggs…the mama bird version of sheltering in place.***

***Oh, and Tappa Keg has Smelt…***

***and if anyone reading or watching this has no clue what that means, send me a note or give me a call.***

***We are in our Fourth Sunday of Easter, the Fourth Sunday of Resurrection.***

***And it’s a neat batch of scripture today in the Lectionary, so let’s dive in.***

***First we have one of the most familiar—Psalm 23—we’re most familiar with the King James Version, but here it now in the New Revised Standard…***

**SCRIPTURE**

**Psalm 23**

God is my shepherd,
   I shall not want.
God makes me lie down
   in green pastures,
and leads me beside
   still waters;

God restores my soul
   and leads me in right paths
for the sake of God's name.

Even though I walk
   through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
   for you are with me;
your rod and your staff--
   they comfort me.

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

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
   all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of God
   my whole life long.

**Acts 2:42-47**

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**John 10:1-10**

Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

SERMON: “Abundantly”

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." The closing words of Jesus on the shepherd metaphor –one of our most popular metaphors, up there with “light in the darkness” and “living water” –and ah… sheep we all are…

Oh, are our lives abundant, right?—Green pastures always, still waters always, no worries, no fears… right?

Friends we’re in the season of Easter. So we’re talking resurrection. We keep building, week by week—holding ressurection to the light like a gorgeous prism and exploring the ways the light catches and bends and shines through into our lives. It is our season to do so. To engage the What, Where, When, and How of this very center of our Christian faith.

We’ve shared about what we could call “Conceptual Resurrection”: WHAT is it? How do we understand it? How have others viewed it through different lenses than our own? How do we honor their words while we celebrate our own.

We’ve shared about what we could call “Applied Resurrection”: WHERE is it? Where do we see it around us? Or put another way, what keeps us from seeing it around us?

And then there’s “Practical Resurrection”: the WHEN and the HOW… How and when do we engage, celebrate, respond, praise, embrace this most central foundation of our faith?

And in those closing words of Jesus, in the Gospel of John, I believe, are the guide posts of what we’ll call “Practical Resurrection 101”

 “That they may have life and have it abundantly”

So…What’s the opposite of abundance? (Why am I asking questions to a camera?)

The opposite of abundance is scarcity. If we’re not living with attention on gratitude and celebration of all the good things that we have been graced with, then we’re living with our focus on all the things we don’t have. All the things we want, or desire. All things we believe would make us happier people.

And I’m here today to remind you that most basic of lessons: Resurrection is the absolute abundance of the presence of God in your life. Worth repeating: *Resurrection is the absolute abundance of the presence of God in your life.* God chose not to leave you hanging, all alone. God chose to engage with you on a day by day basis. We have, at the center of our faith, God’s presence in abundance. All God asks is that we be aware of it… accept it, engage it, respond to it, live into it—because in doing so, in living into it—we are taught to do the same we might do with any abundance we might have—we are taught to share it. “Did you bring enough for everybody?” as we were taught in school.

That’s what “Practical Resurrection” is all about… bringing enough for everybody…sharing God’s abundance.

Let me put it this way:

I’m driving through Wisconsin yesterday and seeing the boats pulled out of storage and getting all gussied up for the fishing opener… and, as is bound to happen when I sit with a sermon all week, I’m starting to make an analogy—*scarcity and abundance in fishing.*

Think of the “Scarcity of Fishing”: *I have a limited time to fish!*  I “NEED” to catch fish because this is one of the few chances I have to do so… ever fished with somebody like that? Yuck.

OR: What is “Abundance Fishing”? I’m out on the water. I’m with friends, or family. “A bad day fishing is better than a good day working” you know.

When you engage God’s abundance in your life, which one are you?

Which is to ask you: how are you sharing it?

Ok, let me keep going on this analogy—“Fishers of Men” is a Biblical phrase we are familiar with, fishers of people…fishers of souls.

Well, Think of the different types of fishing…

 There’s the Net—we cast it out wide…

 There’s Jigging—slowly, quietly, patiently

 There’s “Target Fishing”—opportunistic—lunker bass under the snag, northern in the weeds.

--I’m not even talking about ice fishing because since I’m not from here, I think it’s just weird, and I’ve heard enough stories about what goes on in those ice fishing sheds.

NET: Cast wide…

This is what the church does… to the community and world around them, to teach each other.

Acts: *All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.*

We are participants in a church where we say “all are welcome.” “Jesus didn’t turn people away and neither do we!” –how do we share that collectively?

Jigging: Psalm 23… when you hear those words… “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for Thou art with me”… those are personal words, they’re comforting words… the deep personal faith, nurtured… how can you share that?

Target Fishing: Oh yes, everyday opportunities*.* The opportunistic moments.

In John: Jesus says: *The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice.*

Friends, the gatekeeper opens the gate in a thousand different ways every day of our lives… for you to hear that voice.

 They “follow him.”

So we “jig” as a discipline so that we may get in tune with the presence of abundance of God in our lives…and we share that…

Then you target fish when the time is right—which is to say: whenever your heart moves you to do so. I think almost every Sunday when I pray I say *Give us the hands, the head, the heart, and wisdom sufficient to do Your work today.*

Then as a church, collectively, we cast the net wide and say: “This is who we are. This is what we do… and YOU are most welcome.”

*PREP FOR MOTHER’S DAY*

And if that is too vague (well, first, consider the source, but also) think of another holiday coming up: Mother’s day.

Use the fishing analogy for mother’s day… and for that matter fathers, guardians and guides of youth everywhere… -what fishing techniques do you use?

To be sure, patience of jigging.

Target fishing—those opportune moments of parenting.

Cast the net wide—long-term teachings and values.

That’s the practice of resurrection, friends.

 Personal practice of getting in tune and being aware.

 Social practice of hearing the voice in the world around you.

 Church-wide practice of casting the net out there.

What we do is share, friends. Our stories, our lives, our faith…that’s how we practice resurrection. Peace be with you, friends.

*A shorter sermon—I promised someone I would try that… but I do want to ask the community watching and reading, to share in that Practice. To share with one another the ways they celebrate abundance of God’s presence in their lives. I know we’re Minnesotans and I know we’re not the best at opening up and sharing everything, but that’s what we do. That’s what we’re called to do by God. That’s our evangelism. That’s our Christianity.*

*So keep in touch friends… send notes, send messages, give calls. Tell each other: how are you engaging, and sharing, and celebrating Resurrection?*