

Easter 4C 4-25-2010
John 10:22-30
Pastor Tim Koester

Bleats of Easter

The children's time today featured a close encounter with 'Leah', a real-live baby goat!

I grew up on a farm that always had a few sheep hanging around but I can't say that I really know very much about being a shepherd. My father was the one who really liked the sheep. My mother and us kids really only saw their negative side. Sheep are trouble. They are always getting out, eating the garden, trampling the flowers and pooping on the sidewalk!

Sheep are stubborn.

You can't herd them anywhere.

They are fragile and vulnerable.

I spent many nights out with dad during lambing season, poking straw up the nose of a newborn hoping a cough would be the breath of life. When those lambs grew, they needed help and protection to survive.

Sheep *need* a shepherd

and over time, sheep develop a relationship with the shepherd. They know the voice of the one who cares for them because he/she communicates in ways they understand. If sheep "bleat" [i.e. bahhh] then shepherds "bleat" back. The shepherd in effect *speaks their language* so the sheep can trust enough to follow. **Everything then, depends upon the shepherd.**

The image of God as shepherd and we as sheep is an ancient one. Psalm 23 paints a remarkable vision of unwavering protection and blessing offered to us by God. Even when we must journey through dark valleys and times of difficulty, our shepherd is with us, leading us forward and helping us to move along even when we have no idea where we are going.

The question is how do we hear the voice of Jesus the Good Shepherd?

How is the Word of God,

the good news of the gospel,

the message of Jesus' death and resurrection, communicated to us?

What "**bleats of Easter**" lead us as sheep through the trials and challenges of life?

For many weeks now, I have been talking about seeing *the colors of Easter*. Living in the reality of the resurrection adds color, depth, beauty, and meaning to our lives. But today I want to focus on *hearing* the resurrection instead of seeing it. Paul says in his letter to the Romans that "faith comes through what is heard" so how exactly do we hear the voice of the good shepherd? How does God "bleat" the good news of Easter in ways we can understand?

Martin Luther talked about 5 different ways, 5 different "bleats" God uses to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ to the world. We might call them 5 distinct *means of God's grace* yet all of them communicate the love and mercy shown to us in the one person, Jesus Christ. Incredibly we experience all 5 this morning in our time together.

The first "bleat" seems obvious enough. We hear the voice of the good shepherd through **words**. We read the word of God from scripture, we sing it in the liturgy and hymns, and the word of God is right now being communicated through the act of preaching. In all of these words, we

trust that the Spirit of God is active among us giving these ordinary human words eternal significance as they speak of God's good news in Jesus Christ. This is not a perfect process of course. Human communication is messy and mis-communications often happen.

Take Tim and Duane, pastors of two Lutheran churches in a small NE town. One day, they were out along the road pounding a sign into the ground that they hoped would save people. It said: **THE END IS NEAR! TURN YOURSELF AROUND BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!**

Just as they were finishing up, a car sped past and the driver yelled from his window, 'Find something better to do - you religious nuts!'

A few seconds later they heard screeching tires and then ...a big splash. Pastor Tim turned to Pastor Duane and asked, 'Do ya think maybe the sign should just say **'Bridge Out'?**'

We mess our words up sometimes yet God finds a way to get through to us despite our failings. Our words will always be incomplete but that's why we keep talking, using many different words to communicate God's one essential Word who walked among us as the God/man Jesus. So each week, we hear different scripture readings, sermons, hymns and liturgies but through all them, God speaks grace to us. That is why it is important to be a part of the worshipping community each week. You never know what you will miss!

The other four *means of grace – the other “bleats” of Easter*, all communicate essentially the same Word of God but in different forms. Each one deserves its own sermon but a dear saint reminded me this week that she appreciates what I *leave out* of sermons as well as I what I put in them! Briefly the other means of grace important for Luther, the other ways we encounter God's saving love for us are:

2) **Baptism** (*where the watery Word of God is poured over us, giving us new birth*)

3) **Holy Communion** (*where we eat and drink God's Word with the whole church. Christ lives in us and we live in him and we re-member we are part of a much larger body that God gathers together all over the world.*)

4) **Confession and forgiveness** (*which we did at the beginning of worship but the door is always, always open for private confession and forgiveness as well to hear God's Word of new beginnings.*)

5) **The mutual consolation of the saints** (*the support and friendship and comfort we give to one another. This is what is sometimes called “the priesthood of all believers”. God gifts and calls every member of the community to be a “repeater” of God's voice. In the words of forgiveness and kindness we share with friends and family, in the deeds of love and mercy we show to strangers and sinners who deserve neither and have no way of repaying us, we “bleat” God's Word of grace. Today we will gather outside and give thanks for the gifts of God that provide food and blessing for the world. This act, together with the vocations each of us are called to, are “bleats” through which God speaks words of grace to the world*)

All 5 of these means, **Word, Water, Meal, Confession, Community**, allow us to hear the voice of the shepherd in ways we can understand. All of them speak the same word. All of them are words of life only because the Spirit gives us faith to trust in God's promise to love us no matter what. None of them is more or less important or necessary than the other. Together they provide a means for us to hear the “bleats of Easter” so that we might follow the good shepherd and be changed people because of it. We are people of new life! We follow the risen Savior! Christ is Risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!** Let that voice beckon you to follow and lead you to new and abundant life starting right here...and right now. Amen.