

**May 3, 2020**  
**Fourth Sunday of Easter**

**ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**  
**Fairview Heights, IL 62208**  
**618-397-6323**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:** What would the church be without announcements?! I hope you are all being safe and staying healthy. As far as I know, no one in our congregation has had the COVID 19. Praise the Lord! We also want to thank you for keeping your offerings coming to the church. For those of you who may not know, Jan and Tom Miller returned from their trip that was canceled due to the virus. They returned about 3 weeks ago and spent the first 2 weeks in quarantine. Jan will have quite a story to tell at Women's Circle when we return to church. Nancy Eisenhower has offered to sew masks for any of you who need them. If you leave your house frequently, you may need several masks since they are supposed to be washed after every use.

As is our tradition, this being the first Sunday of the month, we will celebrate communion in the worship service that follows. Please have your piece of bread or cracker and something to drink handy as you read this service. We will be communing with our hearts and prayers, even as we keep our distance.

This Sunday's Psalm is the 23<sup>rd</sup>. What better way to receive God's promise of safety than in this Psalm? (Page 1)

**Service Prayers for the Fourth Sunday of Easter**

*Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10.*



**CALL TO WORSHIP:** *(based on Psalm 23)*

Let us pray these familiar words,  
recognizing in the Risen Christ our Good Shepherd:

**Jesus, you are our shepherd. We shall never want.  
You make us lie down in green pastures;  
you lead us beside the still waters. You restore our souls.  
You guide us in the paths of righteousness for your name's  
sake. Even though we may walk through the valley of the  
shadow of death, we fear no evil, for you, Christ, comfort  
us. Jesus has prepared a table for us in the presence of our  
foes; Jesus has anointed us with the oil of salvation; our  
cup runs over!**

**Surely, goodness and mercy will follow us  
all the days of our lives,  
And we will dwell in the house  
of our Holy Savior forever and ever. Amen.**

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## **INVOCATION:**

Incarnate God, **You** are the one who comes to us in Jesus Christ. Holy One, **You** are the one who comes to us in the Holy Spirit. Sovereign of Earth and Heaven, **You** are the one who calls us to recognize you today and every day as splendid *Mystery*. Gather our hearts and minds this day. Let us worship you in awe and wonder!

**CONFESSION:** Merciful and Loving God, we ask forgiveness because our consciousness of you is dimmed by everyday desires and needs. **Raise our consciousness of you, O God.**

We forget that we are a reflection of your image.  
We act as though you are a Sunday-only event.  
**Increase our mindfulness of you, O God.**

Help us to a greater common awareness  
of your deep mystery and infinite presence.  
**Rouse our awareness of you, God.**

Open our eyes from surface focus to depth perception.  
Turn our heads from shallow concerns to eternal truths.  
**Awaken us from faint-heartedness, O God.**

Forgive us for our narrow and selfish ways.  
Save us from cheap grace with your amazing grace.  
**Forgive us, O God. We ask in Jesus' precious name. Amen.**

**WORDS OF ASSURANCE:** Holy, Forgiving God, we are your sheep. You keep us awake and aware. Bless you and praise you for forgiving us when we are barely mindful enough to ask. Help us to enter by the door when we hear the voice of the Good Shepherd. We hear your voice of pardon. (Page 3)

Through Christ's grace we are forgiven this morning, and we go in. **Amen.**

**MESSAGE:** As you read Psalm 23, you understand that this psalm begins with a metaphor; just to review, in a metaphor something is said to be something else that it obviously and literally is not. In the Bible a metaphor becomes the image at which and through which something or someone is known and understood. It conveys more, and it speaks more powerfully than is possible to do in regular speech. A metaphor draws on varied experience and evokes imagination.

I invite you to keep that in mind as we explore these words that were written over 3000 years ago. Biblical scholars have searched for the original meaning or for the correct explanation or time (present, past, or future) that the poem refers to, yet none of those things have been revealed. I would call it words meant for all times and places, including now, for us as we shelter in place during this pandemic.

There are times in our lives that we need a shepherd to take care of us. When we are distracted by worrying about a meat shortage, or the need for masks, or where to get toilet paper, the shepherd gently gathers us together in his care. The shepherd will find us food, water, and shelter. We will lack nothing that we need.

When we don't know when things will change and how our world will look when we step out of our homes, the shepherd says, "I will remain with you. I will lead you out of this wilderness." We must stay together as a flock, having trust and faith, and the good shepherd will take care of us. This is God's promise. (Page 4)

In the last verse of our Gospel text, John 10:1-10 we read these words from Jesus, “I came so that you may have life – indeed, so that you can live life to the fullest.”

Trust in these promises of God, and give thanksgiving to the one who is giving these promises. I invite you to read John 10:1-10 and meditate on all these things. Amen.

**OFFERTORY PRAYER:** Good Shepherd of the Sheep, you have opened the door to new life for us through your dedication and your sacrifice.

May we reflect your love for us by opening the doors of our hearts to you and your church in the act of giving our tithes and offerings.

**OFFERTORY DEDICATION:** Thank you, Risen Christ, for moving the hearts of the people to give of themselves. May our offerings of service and financial support give voice to your work for justice and peace in this world. May we grow more mindful of you through our giving and our living.

**Amen.**

**HOLY COMMUNION:** By Jeanyne Slettom

Jesus said: I am the bread of life. All who come to me shall not hunger, and all who believe in me shall not thirst.

With Christians around the world and throughout the centuries, we gather around these symbols of bread and wine—simple elements that speak of nourishment and transformation.

Let us pray.

Loving God, we thank you that you are as close to us as breath, that your love is constant and unending.

We thank you for all that sustains life, and especially for

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an ethic of justice and peace, and for the promise of transformation made manifest in his life, death and resurrection.

***(Hold up your “bread” and your cup.)***

We ask you to bless this bread and this cup.

Through this meal, make us the body of Christ, that we may join with you in promoting the well-being of all creation. Amen.

We remember on the night when Jesus and the disciples had their last meal together, Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, and gave it to the disciples, saying “This is my body, which is broken for you. Take and eat it, and as often as you do, remember me.” In the symbol of the broken bread, we participate in the life of Christ and dedicate ourselves to being his disciples. ***(Partake of the bread)***

In the same way he took the cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to the disciples, saying: “Drink this, all of you. This cup is the new covenant, poured out for you and for many. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. In the symbol of the cup, we participate in the new life Christ brings. ***(Partake of the cup.)***

Let us pray. We give thanks, loving God, that you have refreshed us at your table. Strengthen our faith; increase our love for one another. As we have been fed by the seed that became grain, and then became bread, may we go out into the world to plant seeds of justice, transformation, and hope. **Amen.** (Page 6)

**BENEDICTION:** *(from 1 Peter and John 10)*

We are called for a purpose: for the sake of knowing and drawing close toward God a person bears up under sorrows.

**All: We are not here by chance.**

We are precious in the sight of God, and as living stones, our lives are being built up into a spiritual sanctuary where the justice and mercy and peace of the Risen Christ may dwell.

**All: We are not here by chance.**

Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

**All: Jesus, we are the sheep of your pasture.**

**God has chosen us. We have chosen God.**

**We are not here by chance. Amen**

**Hymn: Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us NCH 252**

Savior, like a shepherd lead us,  
much we need your tender care;  
in your pleasant pastures feed us,  
for our use your folds prepare.  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,  
you have bought us, yours we are.  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,  
You have bought us, your we are.

*Service Prayers for Easter 4 was written and arranged by the Rev. Marilyn Kennedy Levine, a United Church of Christ pastor in the Northern Plains Conference*

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**ST. JOHN PRAYER LIST:** Dave Seneczyn, Eric White, Lori Riess, Charles Chamberlin, Donna Isselhard, Mitch Nallie, Candy Pearce, Greg Talley, Carol Meyer, Leah Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess, Rich Schmitt, Les Sattery, Cherie Klostermann, Shari Hamilton, Charlotte Watson, Becky Ballard, Hanna Mosco, Bill Underwood.

**EASTER 2019**



**Whether gathered or scattered, God is with us.**

**Amen.**

Peace and Blessings, Pastor Rosemary  
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