

**Fourth Sunday of Easter
Good Shepherd Sunday
April 26, 2026**

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

You can go on YouTube and seek cartoons for the readings. [Kids big and small like these].

This Sunday offers preachers a rare opportunity to put texts that are often cherry-picked or selectively used into their full context:

1 Peter 2:24: “By his wounds, you have been healed...”

John 10:10: “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly...”

Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...”

I’ve preached Psalm 23 dozens of times, almost always at funerals. What most people hear in that context are its opening and closing reassurances in the face of grief and death.

On “Good Shepherd Sunday,” however, the preacher may be delighted by the opportunity to direct the congregation’s attention to richer, deeper meanings of Psalm 23 as a whole.

One such overarching theme is God’s abundance and providence. For a tangible example of the metaphors of green pastures and still waters, look no further than the testimony of Acts 2 about the life of the early Christian community. The idyllic imagery of the earliest Christians sharing their material possessions with “glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:46) and living out the angelic promise of “good news of great joy for all the people” (Luke 2:10) is a lovely portrait that nicely complements the familiar, comforting landscape in Psalm 23.

This theme carries into the Gospel reading as well. In John 10:9-10, Jesus says, “Whoever enters by me ... will find pasture,” and “have life abundantly.” Many commentators note that *zoē*, the Greek word for “life” used here, carries a more “spiritual” or “theological” meaning than *bios*, the other Greek word for life used in the New Testament. When we read Psalm 23 alongside Acts 2 and John 10, we can see how the resurrected life we celebrated at Easter can (and indeed must!) spring forth in the midst of our everyday living.

Anyone familiar with Paul’s letters, however, knows that the early church was not without its internal divisions and conflicts. The author of Psalm 23 reminds us that God’s provision is made “in the presence of my enemies” (v. 5). God’s protection is offered in the dark and foreboding “valley” (v. 4). And, in the selected passage from John 10, Jesus warns of the presence of “thieves and bandits” among the sheepfold (v. 1).

In [Rereading the “Shepherd Discourse,”](#) Karoline M. Lewis argues against the traditional linear reading of John 10 as a parable (vv.1-5) and explanation (vv. 7-10). Instead, like Psalm 23, what Jesus offers here is a collection of oral images that combine in a single meaning-picture. According to Lewis, “it is the interconnectedness of its imagery and figurative language by which a more comprehensive meaning of the passage is found.”

The Good News is found in the dynamic, contrastive depiction of the thieves and bandits, on the one hand, and the shepherd and gate on the other. The former enter the sheepfold without using the gate, but they cannot lead the sheep out (v. 5) because the sheep don’t listen to them (v. 8). Indeed, the thieves and bandits come among the sheep to “steal, kill and destroy.” By contrast, Jesus, the shepherd, is the gate (v. 7 and 9); the sheep hear him (v. 3) because they know him (v. 4), and therefore are not only drawn to him, but can also go with him to “find pasture” (v. 9).

This contrast – between the one who truly knows, leads, and gives life, and those who fail to do so – invites many illustrations and applications for today. I leave it to the preacher to find the application best suited to their context.

Some may chafe at this comparison, however. After all, nowadays “gatekeeping” is a pejorative word defined in the Urban dictionary as one who “takes it upon themselves to decide who does or does not have access or rights to a community or identity.”

Christ died that we may have life, and have it abundantly; yet to many people today, Jesus is the ultimate “gatekeeper.” Bible verses like “whoever enters by me will be saved” (John 10:9) and “No one comes to the father except through me” (John 14:6) are precisely the sort that are often *cherry-picked* to prove the exclusive/exclusionary character of the Christian religion.

But considered in a fuller context, a different picture is revealed. The thieves and bandits aren’t excluded from the sheepfold; in fact, they are more than able to enter it (just not by the gate). Like the table prepared “in the presence of enemies” (Psalm 23:5) – or the table where Jesus shared bread and wine with his betrayer (John 13:26) – this passage suggests that God brings life even in the presence of thieves and bandits.

This Good Shepherd Sunday, we are invited to resist the tendency to cherry-pick and weaponize Scripture and instead offer the Word in all its abundance. This holistic sensibility is characteristic of what Otis Moss III calls “Blue Note Preaching.”

In [Blue Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World](#), he writes, “The hermeneutic for the Blue Note homiletic seeks contextualization and artistic imagination, drawn from engagement with Scripture and deep, abiding spirituality.”

In the Good Shepherd discourse, we can recognize Jesus as a “Blue Note” preacher, engaging our imaginations, drawing us in with the familiar sound of his voice, and emboldening us, as Moss writes, to “dare speak with authority in the midst of tragedy.” May the preachers on Good Shepherd Sunday follow his lead.

Questions for reflection on Good Shepherd Sunday

1. Where in your life or community are you tempted to “cherry-pick” what is comforting or familiar, rather than receiving the fullness of God’s Word — even when it challenges or stretches you?
2. How might you embody the kind of abundant, shared life described in Psalm 23 and Acts 2 in your own context?
3. If God’s life-giving presence is not limited by the presence of “thieves and bandits,” where might you be called to trust that abundance can still emerge – even in spaces marked by betrayal, conflict, or harm – and how might that reshape the way you show up there?