



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Fourth Sunday of Easter, May 3, 2020

by Garland F. Pierce

The Gate's Protection, The Shepherd's Promise

John 10:1-10

10:1 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.

10:2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.

10:3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

10:4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.

10:5 They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers."

10:6 Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

10:7 So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.

10:8 All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them.

10:9 I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.

10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Abundant life sounds strange to our ears as we try to navigate the wilderness of uncertainty, loss, and pain that is this coronavirus pandemic. This pandemic is most definitely the one who has entered the sheepfold to steal, kill, and destroy. In the midst of all of this, *abundant life* sounds like too much to even hope or ask for.

The global economy has all but completely collapsed. Millions are unemployed or are at best underemployed. Many workers deemed essential still must struggle to make certain that they and their families have the essentials and are safe and well. Food banks and pantries are stretched to capacity. Shelves are bare; accounts empty. The unhoused do not have the luxury to stay inside and shelter in place. Preachers of prosperity gospel and politicians who seem to be slaves to capitalism and the pursuit of wealth rather than focusing on lives and safety might define *abundant life* as material possessions, large financial portfolios, and upward market trends. If these are the only ways to determine and measure the *abundant life*, then as we look around, *abundant life* is hard to see.

The religious leaders of Jesus' time looked for *abundant life* as well as for a messiah. To them, Jesus was not it! In their eyes, there was no way he could deliver them or bring about it—*abundant life*. Jesus dared declare that he was the one and did not stop until he opened physical and spiritual eyes so that others too could see who he was and what we could and would do. He presented a problem for the religious leaders who could not and would not see; they sought to kill him. In response to them, he declares that he is an essential worker that is often overlooked and undervalued but who is essential for life and the well-being of all—a shepherd—a good shepherd. The religious leaders are thieves and robbers. The people are the sheep. The shepherd knows and loves the sheep; and, the sheep know the shepherd and will follow. The thieves have limited if any interest in the true well-being of the sheep; but, the essential worker, the good shepherd, is willing to risk his well-being, even his life. The sheep find safety in numbers—gathered in as a flock. The gate provides safety. Jesus declares that he is the gate—the way to salvation. Jesus further promises, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” Jesus does not compute life based on the number of things that one has. Apparently, insurance companies and even the US government have a formula that is used to calculate the worth of one life. The abundant life that Jesus brings is more than what can be imagined or anticipated or calculated. With the promise of the Good Shepherd, even evil and death are not feared as we walk the journey of abundant life even through darkest valleys and the shadow of death. With the promise of the Good Shepherd, tables are prepared before enemies, cups run over, and goodness and mercy chase after us. Abundant life is not measured in riches nor in length of years but can only be calculated through the equation of an empty cross, an empty tomb, and eternal life.

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect and/or share—We speak of pastors as shepherds. In Jesus' time, shepherds were not necessarily the highest or most beloved or respected in society, yet they were present at Jesus' birth and Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd. It must have been a shock to those who heard him. Shepherds were essential workers during their day. Talk about the essential workers—the earthly good shepherds of this period of pandemic.

PRAY: Savior, like a shepherd, lead us, much we need Thy tender care. In Thy pleasant pastures feed us, For our use Thy folds prepare; Blessed Jesus, Blessed Jesus! Thou hast bought us, Thine we are. AMEN.

From Savior, Like a Shepherd, Lead Us, AMEC Hymnal, #379, words attributed to Dorothy A. Thrupp, 1779-1847

ACT:

1. If you know some of the essential workers—the earthly good shepherds--personally, call them by name. Pray for them. Find a way to show your appreciation for their sacrifices (It may be as simple as telling them “Thank you.”)
2. See also the children’s activity that accompanies this devotion.
3. Revisit the Psalm 23 Challenge first issued as part of the March 22, 2020 set of resources.

Song:

I Am Weak, and I Need Thy Strength
(Lead Me, Guide Me)
AMEC Hymnal, #378

1. I am weak, and I need Thy strength and power
To help me o-ver my weak-est hour;
Let me through the dark-ness Thy face to see,
Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

Refrain:

*Lead me, guide me a-long the way;
For if You lead me, I can-not stray;
Lord, let me walk each day with Thee,
Lead me, O Lord, lead me.*

2. Help me tread in the paths of right-eous-ness;
Be my aid when Sa-tan and sin op-press.
I am put-ting all my trust in Thee,
Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

Refrain

3. I am lost, if you take your hand from me;
I am blind, without Thy Light to see;
Lord, just al-ways let me Thy serv-ant be,
Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

Refrain

Alternative Song:

Gracious, Good Shepherd, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8npBhe3NDTw>
written by Rob Mathes, performed by Vanessa Williams, Album: *Star Bright*.

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



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The Christian Education Department, AMEC Publishing House, and others will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.