***“My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.”***

Those are the words of the ***“Good Shepherd”***[[1]](#footnote-1) and also the keeper of the ***“Gate for the sheep”***[[2]](#footnote-2).

 A good shepherd calls on his own sheep by name. He leads them, keeps watch over them while protecting them from all dangers. The shepherd develops a special bond with his flocks by spending quality time with them. He knows each of his flock’s behaviors and their attitude. He hears their cry when they are sick or in distress. Jesus described Himself as the Good Shepherd, as He was willing to lay down his life for his flock, no matter what. Both the sheep and the shepherd know each other and they trust each other based on this special bond that they’ve developed over the years.

 In the passage that we read earlier from the Gospel of John, Jesus reminded us that no matter what trials that life may bring, we are never too far away from the voice of the Great Shepherd, who keeps watch over us day and night. The relationship between the sheep and the Shepherd was also beautifully portrayed by the shepherd boy David in the famous Psalm 23, as we read earlier in our Opening *Call-to-Worship*.

 In this Psalm, the Psalmist contrasted the bond between the Shepherd and the sheep with that of the one shared between our Heavenly Father and Mother, and the children.

 This morning we are invited to meditate upon our relationship with God who is like the Great Shepherd, the Gatekeeper and a loving mother to us all. ***“Is Jesus still the Great Shepherd in our lives? Do we recognize the Shepherd’s voice when He calls upon us? Or do we continue to wander in our own separate ways.”***

 This is a question about our allegiance. Of all the voices that are out there, whose voice do we listen to the loudest? And who’s there to rescue us when we’ve gone astray from our path? Jesus said*,* ***"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."*** *[[3]](#footnote-3)*

 As the Gatekeeper, the Shepherd safeguards us and keeps watch over us. His job is not to keep us out of the gate, but rather keep those who may cause harm to us away from the sheep’s pen. Undoubtedly there will be some sheep who would refuse to go where the Shepherd guides them. **But in spite of our rebellious attitude and stubborn minds, God remains with us as a faithful, loving, compassionate and caring God.** TheGreat Shepherd is willing to risk his own life in order to find those who are lost amongst the other 99. The Shepherd will lead us by lighting the path in the midst of our world of darkness.

 The imagery of the Shepherd was prophecized in the days of the Old Testament prophets. As we read from the prophet Ezekiel, the LORD seeks after His own sheep. He will rescue them among those who are scattered. He will seek those who are lost and bring back those that are strayed. He will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. He will seek justice in the world of abuse and exploitation. Today, as we know is also Mother’s Day. We want to wish all of our mothers amongst us for all that they’ve done for their children. It is very tempting for us to focus all of our attention on this day upon our Mothers. We may draw the parallel between the Great Shepherd and our Mothers…how they tender their love and their care upon their children, how they nurse them and protect them. **However**, I invite you to think of Mother’s Day a little differently today….because **NOT everyone is a mother, yet she might be a mother-figure to others.** I’m sure we all know someone like that. We must also be mindful of those who no longer have their moms to celebrate with but only in memory and in spirit. God still loves them no matter what. For those who still have our mothers with us, cherish them!

 There are women who have no biological children of their own. They may or may not be married. Some choose NOT to have children or unable to have children. Some may have suffered miscarriage during pregnancy, delivered a still-born child, or even lost their life after giving birth.

 Other women who may have been divorced, widowed and later on re-married and instantly became step-mothers from their spouses. I have a few friends like that also.

 Some women might become mothers not by choice, while painfully bearing the emotional and physical scars of domestic violence, rape, incest or abusive relationships and were forced to give up their children for adoption or foster care. Or mothers who are imprisoned or addicted with alcohol or other substances. These are moms too!

 Others may choose to become adopted mothers who went out of the extraordinary ways to extend their gift of God-given love through that special child, who may have been physically, psychologically and mentally challenged.

 All of these are special mothers who also deserve recognitions for their personal sacrifice. They too are the shepherds and the gatekeepers for their children under there care and vigilance. They protect them and keep them safe while under their watch. They tender them with special love and attention that no one can replace. They ARE the true Gatekeeper of God’s household.

 Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child, God promised that He will never abandon His people in the midst of trials and challenges. Peace and justice shall prevail over hatred and violence.

 Like a tenderly loving mother, the Holy Spirit prays and intercedes for us. She will heal our wounds and console us of our despairs and losses. She will surrender her love unconditionally for the sake of her children. No matter what our future holds, God’s mothering hand remains firmly in control, holding us and embracing us still and will never let us go. Yesterday I attended the funeral of my friend’s grandmother whom we’ve been praying for last week – the Lu family. After a period of prayerful discernment, the family had decided to relieve their mother from the life-support and very soon after she took her last breath here on earth. The family was a PEACE that their mother and grandmother are no longer suffering in pain and is now with God. It was a very painful and difficult decision, as you would imagine.

 At the funeral, one of the granddaughters chose and read a passage that was relevant to her heart. She took it from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the early church in Rome. The passage brought special meaning to her during this time of trails and challenges in life. It reminded her about the love that her grandmother has shared with them in light of God’s love to us all.

 The Apostle Paul reminded us that ***“neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, [nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”[[4]](#footnote-4)***

Friends, like our mother, the Good Shepherd is calling out upon Her sheep. The Gatekeeper is keeping the gate opened for us to enter in and to keep us safe from the dangers of evil. **Jesus came so that we may have life and have it abundantly.[[5]](#footnote-5) Like our earthly mother, God gives us life and vows to love us till the end through our faith in Jesus Christ.**

 When we embrace the fullness of the Holy Spirit, God give us this new life and empower us to do great things while accomplishing God’s mission here on earth. As we are transitioning from the season of Easter into the season of Pentecost, we invite the Holy Spirit to reign in our lives. The Holy Spirit empowers us and helps us see things in a new and unimaginable way. As the Psalmist declared, “*Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord, the righteous shall enter through it.”[[6]](#footnote-6)*

 *We love because God first loved us.[[7]](#footnote-7)* That love is unconditional and encompassing while bearing no boundaries. *Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.[[8]](#footnote-8)*

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *John 10:11* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *John 10:7* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *John 14:6-7* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Romans 8:38-39* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *John 10:10* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Psalm 118:19-20* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *1 John 4:19* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *1 John 4:7-8, 11-12* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)