

On the Fourth Sunday of Easter, we have the opportunity to hear two very familiar stories to most. We hear maybe the most famous scripture in the bible to both church goers and non-church goers because of funerals in Psalm 23 and then we hear about Jesus being the shepherd.

Many of us love hearing John 10 because it reminds us that we have a God who showers us with unending and unfailing love and care. I think each of us want to be loved and comforted and knowing that we have a Shepherd that walks with us is reassuring.

However, in the text; there is a curveball that is thrown. That curveball is thrown to us in verse 16:

You need to know that I have other sheep in addition to those in this pen. I need to gather and bring them, too. They'll also recognize my voice. Then it will be one flock, one Shepherd.

When I hear this, I am reminded that it is NOT just about us. There are others out there that are connected to the Kingdom of God. But, at a deeper-level, I think that it is a call for us to hear about the importance of diversity. The Body of Christ is incomplete and there are many individuals who have not yet heard this message of love and grace and have not been connected with Christ.

Thus, here is a question that I would love for you, me, and us to wrestle with. Who is it that have yet taken their place in our beloved community? Then, what have you / us done to create a welcoming place for them and have sent out the invitation to them.

I know that it can be tough. I want to encourage you though to help us here at Bay View to be a place where oneness occurs. This can occur because we are called to Oneness in Christ and this oneness allows us to welcome diversity. The diversity can occur in many realms.

In the U.S. we often separate ourselves among culture, race, classes and once again even political affiliation. Can we “erase” some of that division and be one within Christ?

In my 27 years of parish ministry, I have found that many times, we seem to “love diversity” when it is far away. We appreciate making a impact outside of our community. We will send people and money across borders but to do that within our community borders can be challenging at times.

So, let me be bold. Please dream with me and let us find ways where and how we can reach out to our immediate neighbors and bring them into the fold. Once again, I believe that the Service team will bring us the opportunity to connect and serve. I will encourage them and you to be involved in our backyard. I think that sometimes, when churches place many arm-length or distant projects on the table that it allows us the security of loving our neighbor without seeing our neighbor. So, can we be challenged to see our neighbor.

Jesus laid down his life for the sheep and is the great shepherd. May we be a guide and point them to this great shepherd. The divisiveness that is occurring is contrary to the divine call. So, what does this mean for us? When Jesus speaks of one fold that belongs to him; the good shepherd; it means that we must love our neighbors in all of their diversity.

As I write out this sermon and give it to you, I am laughing a bit inside. On Wednesday when I met with the local pastors for our text study and we discussed what we were preaching on, I told them that I was preaching on Psalm 23. That is the reason that every single piece of liturgy is

centered on that text. Yet, I have not touched that text, I guess the Holy Spirit had a different view as I wrote the words to speak to you. But, I do want to share with you the words of Psalm 23 in a different light and give you an insight that I found that I am hoping will speak to you; where you are at today.

1-3 God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing. You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from. True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction.

4 Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I'm not afraid when you walk at my side. Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure.

5 You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies. You revive my drooping head; my cup brims with blessing.

6 Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life. I'm back home in the house of God for the rest of my life.

When I was at Glas Coffeehouse prepping for the sermon and thought that I was going to preach the whole sermon from Ps. 23, the line in this translation that jumped off the page were these 12 words:

Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life.

Now many of you probably memorized Ps 23 in the King James Version Bible; thus, you are more familiar with these words:

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:

Once in a while, I love looking at the original language and trying to figure out why the translators chose the word or sentence structure that they did. Let me give you a little history on the word. The word in verse 6 is **radaph**.

The Message translates it as chase

The King James translates it follow

The best translation for the word is probably pursue. Thus, chase may be the more accurate. But, here is the kicker, in my opinion. This verb is a surprising very choice BECAUSE this word is usually used for the enemies that are chasing down the psalmist with the intent to overtake and destroy. Then one more word and I will wrap this up, I promise. **Aq** is the word that is translated as "Surely". The better translation would probably be only. So, what does this mean for you.

Only God is chasing you down.

God's love and God's grace is pursuing you. No matter what you do or where you go, God will continue to pursue you. Thus, as you are on this journey of live, know that God is indeed with you on the journey.

Amen.