

THE UNTIRING GOOD SPIRIT
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Fourth Sunday in Easter
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

John 10:11-18

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

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The world is possibly on the verge of a swine flu pandemic. Human life is threatened once again by a microscopic enemy. If it's not one thing it's another.

Where's the Good Shepherd when we need one?

"Wolves" of one kind or another are prowling within and without. And let me hasten to add an apology to wolves. It's not that wolves are more sinister than any other creature. It's that everyone and everything lives among predators of one kind or another. If you're a sheep, beware of wolves. If you're a wolf beware of bears (and Alaskans in helicopters). If you're a human beware of fear, greed, grudges, resentment, hatred, and arrogance.

Where's the Good Shepherd when we need one?

Where's the Good Shepherd?

Right where she's been all along. Preparing a table in the midst of our enemies. The big news isn't that we get sick or go to war. The big news is that we stay healthy and peaceful for even one minute. The world is full of pathogens and cranks. But guess what: communities of scientists, caregivers, public health workers, peacemakers and mediators keep rising to cultivate more peaceful and healthy societies.

And that's not all. We are, as the psalmist put it, "fearfully and wonderfully" made. Second by second, minute by minute, day by day, year after year our bodies resist and neutralize a million attacks without us giving it a thought. We might say our Autonomic Nervous System is a "good shepherd" nourishing and fortifying our bodies with water and nutrients while we go about our lives.

For billions of years planet earth has spawned millions of species all susceptible to death, decay and predators. And yet life goes on and on and on. As the epic story of evolution reveals, without death there would be no life. The Spirit in the earth is so powerful even death spawns life.

Love, we say, is stronger than death but that doesn't mean death is easy to swallow. Yes, resurrection happens. But all resurrections are preceded by crucifixion of one sort or another. Which is to say, when we lay down or surrender our lives for others, in small and ordinary ways, greater life and greater love arises on this planet. You can see it in the epic story of evolution and you can see it in the story of the Resurrection.

You can also see it, hear it and taste it in this Eucharistic community meal. The body of the grain is broken that we might eat bread. The blood of the grape is spilt that we might drink wine. Don't let the miniaturized portions fool you. We now know that a microscopic atom packs great power and these tiny tokens of the earth pack the powerful, gracious presence of the Great Spirit.

The voice of Christ at this Table may be heard as the voice of the Great Spirit in the Earth. *This is my body, this is blood—blessed, broken, spilt, and given that you might live. Pleases, remember that. Remember me. Be grateful. Give your life that others might live.*

The voice of Christ at this Table may also be heard as the voice of the Beloved Community rising in the wake of Jesus' death. You need not cling to life. Let go. Give of yourself. Give of your precious time. Believe that the smallest act of kindness including deep listening to another, contributes to the great and glorious cosmic story unfolding through time and love. You are important, precious and beloved. But the story is not only about you or me. God's love embraces pathogens, predators and cranks.

The Resurrection of Christ is not about how once upon a time Jesus' body started up again after it was dead. It's about how Christ is embodied in us, God's love made flesh, with a power that overwhelms everything, even death itself. When you love, even in your weakness and your failure, you participate in something eternal; you pass out of the world of appearances into something unseen that is infinite. Even when your love seems to accomplish nothing, it triumphs. This is the meaning of resurrection. Steve Garnaas-Holmes

Jesus said: do not be afraid. Consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. Hasn't the Great Spirit cared for them for a billion years or more? Why, then, do you worry about this and that? You see, we can trust this untiring Good Spirit as long as we are where we are meant to be. The lily in the field. The bird in the air. Humans in Christ, which is to say abiding in God, which is to say, abiding in love.

That doesn't mean we stop working. It means we stop worrying about how it will all turn out. We can trust the untiring good Spirit as we trust the buoyancy of the sea.

That's what Jesus taught and that, as it turns out, is what the world teaches if we but pay attention. It helps to be still and know that God is God and we are not.