

The Voice(s) of Christ the Good Shepherd—Fourth Sunday of Easter

[Acts 9:36-43](#)

[Psalm 23](#)

[John 10:22-30](#)

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Sermon delivered at Christ the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Hamden, CT

Last week we were with Peter in the Gospel of John, out on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. And we talked about the Psalmist's states of being as well in Psalm 30. Order. Disorder. Reorder—and how after a time of upheaval, change, transformation, there's no going back. After experiencing the Resurrection too, there's no going back.

Peter tried to go back in the Gospel of John. He was a fisherman by trade, and he tried going fishing again. He caught nothing. And then, he and some of the disciples saw the Resurrected Christ on the shore. And there, Jesus reminded Peter of his new life. So, in the Book of Acts this morning, we flash forward! We see Peter living his transformed life. Living his transformed, Resurrected, reordered life—Peter now, himself, is a source of life.

Just as when Jesus resuscitated the little girl, daughter of Jairus in Luke's Gospel—he said to her "Little girl, get up." ... now Peter does the same, to this disciple named Dorcas, or Tabitha, he says "get up." Peter is a source of life. And folks share the story. People tell of God's power that flows from the Resurrection Christ into Christ's Church. Indeed, the author of Luke and Acts writes: "This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord."

Last week I was also talking about telling stories. Telling our own stories. Stories of life, of transformation, stories of moving from order, to disorder, to reorder. I've asked you all to share those stories with me. Or, even, to come up and share them yourself. So, I'm going to start with a small, deceptively simple story, told to me by Don Erickson.

Don Erickson comes to our congregation from the former Christ Lutheran. And Don is 91, I believe. He recently has had some health troubles—and has let his apartment go and is living at Hamden Health Care right down the road. The last time I was with him, we were reviewing his life. He was grateful for many things in his life, but he was also lamenting that now he's in a tough spot—waiting for God.

He used to come to worship, of course, but now he can't really get out of bed. Don used to be a tither, but now he's got no money to give. Don is living the story of our Psalm this morning for

real. Thinking about this order, disorder, reorder formula in the Psalms, Psalm 23, a perennial classic, is—if you pay attention—located firmly in disorder. This Psalmist is currently in the valley of the shadow of death. The mountains of trouble are blocking the sun. The Psalmist is in the presence of their enemies—be it death, decay, worry or otherwise. And the mercy and goodness that the Psalmist writes of are a hope for the future, that the Lord will guide, God will shepherd, come what may.

So, back to Don. Don was telling me a story. He said when he was 85, his wife died. He loved his wife very much, and they had a lovely relationship. and being quite lost without her, he had gotten an invitation to go to his high school reunion. Now, Don grew up in the Seattle, Washington, area, in case you didn't know. So, into his car he goes, at 85, and he drives west. And he said it was a lonesome drive. As he was driving through Nevada, or someplace he said, and he remembered driving through a valley. And he was just so taken by this valley: He said it was the most beautiful landscape he had ever seen.

It struck him to his core, he was overwhelmed. And, amidst his troubles, his loss, and fears—he said he exclaimed out loud in his car, he prayed out loud: **“God, you made this for me!?”** **Wow...** Don heard God's voice, God speaking to him. Don heard the Shepherd's voice, there, in the valley.

Now, maybe part of you says, sure, landscapes are nice. But does God speak through them? The skeptic in you might say, I know how the landscape of Nevada was formed—through eons of volcanoes and tectonic plates shifting, random occurrences of water flowering and erosion. Did God make that for Don? No.

But that's very much beside the point. The point is that Don is one of Christ's sheep. He heard the voice. “Don, I love you. I made you, beauty is still beautiful and I am with you.” This is what Jesus is talking about in our Good Shepherd gospel from John. “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.” God speaks, and we must listen.

Scripture is not a history book, a rule book, a dictionary—it is a place where God speaks to us and to our lives. Creation, as well, this world, is not damned or wicked or evil. This is God's good creation through which God meets us and speaks to us. God spoke in Jesus becoming flesh, here. God spoke in Christ's cross, of loneliness, abandonment and mercy. God speaks through valleys and shepherds, wine and bread, water and oil and art and music and everything else. God also speaks, as we see in the apostles Peter's actions—through us. We are part of God's creation, we are sheep, members of Christ's church. We are also part of Christ, our Good Shepherd's, body.

Don's story and the story in the Book of Acts teaches us the same thing: God speaks. God speaks through barriers, God breaks in. God's Word of life breaks into lonesome care rides. God's Word of life, through Peter, breaks past the threshold of death. So, let us keep speaking, keep telling our stories. And let us keep listening, closely and deeply, to the voice of Christ, the Good Shepherd, and the voices here at Christ the Good Shepherd.

Amen.