

LOVE BIG!

Lord of the sheepfold, whose love is not for hire, who calls to himself the victims of the world: we thank you that Christ laid down his life for us when we could not help ourselves; in the weakness of his love give us strength to work for peace in the world he came to serve, through Jesus Christ, the good shepherd. Amen.

Based on Prayers for an Inclusive Church, Steven Shakespeare

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

1 John 3:16-25, Psalm 23, John 10:11-18

APRIL 25, 2021

St. Mark's-in-the-Valley

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

THE REV. COURTNEY TAN, PRIEST

It isn't easy being a shepherd. It involves more than moving sheep from one pasture to another, finding the flock food and water, and corralling wanderers. Being a shepherd involves dedication, commitment, selflessness. It means being prepared to do whatever it takes to keep the sheep safe from predators and harsh conditions. The shepherd leads the flock, keeping an eye out for dangers, trusting that the sheep will follow. He is the first defense against thieves or animals. The rod and staff aid the shepherd, the rod is often a spear to drive off predators, and the staff or crook is

used to guide sheep, snag lambs caught in undergrowth, and help the shepherd keep his footing on uneven ground.

A hired hand's motivation is different. In exchange for wages, they perform certain duties but may lack the same love and dedication as a shepherd. Their care for the sheep may not extend to risking their lives to fight off a predator, or staying out all night searching for a lost sheep.

Though performing the same function as the shepherd, the hired hand works from a different perspective; that of satisfying their own commitments rather than love of the sheep. In a recent

interview, Bp. Michael Curry said, “Love is the most durable element, other-centeredness is the antidote to self-centeredness.”¹ Facing outwards, recognizing that we are enough, and bringing others to the realization that they are enough, is following Jesus’ example of leading in love. This is the ongoing work of Easter which is not a single moment in time, but an ongoing reality. We are an Easter people; it is a choice. Jesus leads, and we the sheep follow because we recognize and feel his love; there is no coercion. Jesus the good shepherd is always present, always looking outwards, always protecting and forgiving.

Like sheep, we may be distracted by side paths, without clearly knowing where they lead. We are exposed to messages via e-mails, social media, even from political advocates striving to entice us, to pull us in, to trust that their product will enrich and fulfill us. Medicines, cosmetics, gadgets, special interest groups are billed as essential to improving our lives and we may not sufficiently question whether

our purchases, likes, and forwarded messages, truly reflect beliefs and causes we espouse. When we disagree, we may tend toward negativity rather than a positive affirmation of our values.² In our weakness we may lose sight of God’s message of being vital and sufficient. Like lost sheep we can become emotionally adrift, unable to think of others, vulnerable to systems seeking to profit by filling the void, promoting a false narrative of scarcity, insecurity, and fear.

Yet, Jesus tells us we are enough. We have enough.

Easter is an ongoing reality in our lives. God the Spirit is constantly at work, leading us in love, enabling us to be all that we can be. God calls us into vitality. God calls us into creating communities sustained through care of others unable to care for themselves, through generosity, rather than scarcity, insecurity, and fear.³

We can choose to see and experience the world, not through headlines, or other media, but through other people. A senior

¹ For People with Bp. Rob Wright (Podcast); “Eastertide with Presiding Bp. Michael Curry: Part 2 of 2,” 4/16/21, Episode 51.

² David J. Lose, “In the Meantime,” 2021.

³ *ibid*

citizen recently reflected that at the age of 84, after Polio, Diphtheria, and Vietnam, life is still enchanting. “This past year,” said the elder, “has not been a personal challenge. I learned a long time ago not to see the world through the printed headlines. I see the world through the people that surround me. I see the world with the realization that we love big. Therefore, I choose to write my own headlines. “Husband loves wife today.” . . . “Old man makes new friend.”⁴

We choose to live into God in us, to wake up each day remembering God abides in us. God loves big, God’s love is not transactional but transformational. We are enough for God, for ourselves, and have plenty to share with others. By finding common ground and working towards goals which benefit everyone we show our own love for others. In the words of today’s reading from the First Letter of John, “. . . *our love must not be simply words or mere talk, it must be true love, which shows itself in action and truth.*”⁵

⁴ Andy Stanley, <https://andystanley.com>.

⁵ 1 John 3:18



ST. MARK'S IN-THE VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

2901 Nojoqui Avenue at Alamo Pintado Avenue, P.O.Box 39, Los Olivos, California 93441

info@smitv.org 805-688-4454 (Church) 805-245-4921 (Rector) 805-688-1815 (Preschool)

www.smitv.org

The Rev. Randall C.K. Day, D. Min., *Priest and Rector*, ✠ The Rev. Courtney A.U. Tan, *Priest*,
Ms. Jeannie Sears May, *Senior Warden*, ✠ Mrs. Karen R. Johnson, *Junior Warden*.