

Easter 4-B  
4/25/21 CTK

*John 10:11-18; 1 John 3:16-24*

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

We all have a lot in common here today. Not just that we all came to church to this morning or that we are part of the same congregation, but that we share a theological framework, a perspective about who God is for us.

We have the Creeds for example, which we confess together every Sunday morning here at CTK. They define God for us as a Trinity: a Creator whom we call the Father, Jesus whom we call God the Son and who we say died for us and rose, and God the Holy Spirit who we say guides us in our lives of devotion to God. This is a doctrine of Christianity, we learn it and it binds us together, gives us unity.

We have the Lord's prayer, which says a lot about how we approach God: we ask God to protect us, to provide for our needs, to forgive us when we mess up.

We have the Ten Commandments, about what God expects from us in our relationship with God and with each other. Don't worship false gods, don't steal.

So we have a lot in common.

On the other hand, each of us understands the Holy Trinity a little differently; or what it means to promise to forgive one another's sins when the rubber hits the road; or what the command not to kill really means in real life. We each have our own journey and it's pretty much up to us to work out our relationship with God we can. As St. Paul says, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

I remember once when a friend of mine, another pastor, shared with me that he was going through a hard time, going through some kind of crisis. He didn't share details, so I asked him, "How is your relationship with God?" He seemed taken aback and said something like, "Oh it's good. I believe in Jesus Christ my Lord and savior, I trust in God's mercy and I know the Holy Spirit is with me." I had been expecting something a little more emotional, which would be my response, something along the lines of "Where are you God!? Why have you abandoned me?!" Or something like "I am just praying help me, help me help me Jesus; thank

you, thank you, thank you because you are all that's keeping me from going under!" So, a little bit different approach for different people.

As much as we have in common, we all have our own unique personal relationship with Jesus, because we are different people. And, I don't mean that that's the only relationship we have because we are also in this together. As a congregation, a nation, a species. He is the Lord of the universe and he knows us a people. And as part of that, we also need to have a good personal relationship with him too.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd he tells us today. He knows his flock, and he knows every single individual sheep in it, he tells us, and in fact he even knows the ones who are not part of his flock yet. Knows their names. And all the individual sheep know him.

In John's gospel Jesus makes strong statements about who he is - the famous "I AM" statements. And they are all over the map. Today he says I am the Good Shepherd. And he also says I am the gate for the sheep; I am the bread of life; I am the light of the world; I am the resurrection and the life. We have all heard these.

Each one of these I AM's is full of infinite possibilities. I am the way, in every situation in life: in grief, when you have lost a loved one, Jesus says he is the way. Someone who connects us all together and gives us energy to do God's will in the world: he is the vine, we are the branches. Someone to guide us through complicated situations in our lives, he is the light. Someone to nurture us when we are hungry for hope: he is the bread of life. In fact, Jesus says in the book of Revelation, as the risen Christ, at some point in eternity, the Lamb of God, sitting on the throne of heaven, surrounded by the multitudes of saints and the angels and the martyrs in white robes, the cherubim and the seraphim, he says "I am the Alpha and Omega." The beginning and the end point of all things. I am the whole megilla. I am whatever you need, whoever you are.

I learned very quickly when I was teaching Junior High School how important it was to learn the students' names. For every class – you had to memorize them all. Partly because if you could call the kids by name they knew that you knew whose parent to call if you needed to. But really, more importantly than that, they knew you cared enough about them to go to the trouble of learning their names. To distinguish them from all the other kids. Each one was special to you. You had a responsibility for the whole class, but in order for that to work you had to know each kid and each had to know that they meant something to you. Jesus knows us, knows our names.

We have new neighbors behind us and they have two little kids. I met them all one day out in the back yard and now the little boy – he’s about four years old – he sees me out in the yard, and he remembers my name. He keeps calling me, “Hey mister Mark.” But I kept forgetting his name and I was too embarrassed to ask again so I’d say “Hey buddy; hey how are you?” But I could tell he wanted me to say his name. So one night when I went inside I racked my brain for his name. I started with A and went through the alphabet until and I finally remembered it: Edwin. So the next day I saw him and I couldn’t wait to say “Hey Edwin” and he was just glowing.

The idea that Jesus just knows each of us by name is a something important about our relationship with him. It’s exciting and comforting. Because that means Jesus cares about us as a flock, as a congregation and as a species, but he also cares about each one of us. About you and about me. He loves you and is willing to lay down his life for you. And for me and for each of us. We all have that in common.

*And now that peace that passes all understanding keep you hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*