Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This fourth Sunday of Easter is Good Shepherd Sunday. Jesus tells us a good shepherd lays down his life for their sheep. Jesus says as the good shepherd knows his own and his own know him. When different shepherds come together, we each of their flocks at watering holes they are mingled together but when it is time to leave, they call to their sheep intermingled amongst the others and they will follow that shepherd. We follow the Shepherd in whom we can trust to always care for us

This is the dirty job for the men and women who herd the flocks. At night they sleep by laying across the gate to protect the sheep from predators. They also make sure that the lead sheep is not leading the flock to danger. There have been stories where the lead sheep went over a cliff and all the sheep follow them to their demises. But the sheep the listeners grew up hearing about are accepting as gifts from God and essential sources of life for the people. The people drank their milk, eat the cheese from that milk and eventually eat those animals. Those that grew up learn not to give names to the animals. Beyond sustain physical life spiritually the sheep were used as sacrifices to the Lord.

Join in thanking God for being our shepherd. Jesus is not a hired hand. For the hired hand who doesn’t care for the sheep, when the going gets tough they get going and the sheep are unprotected. Unlike the hired Jesus as the good Shepherd, he is committed to the sheep. In the bacon and egg breakfast the chicken participates by the pig is committed. The earliest images of Jesus found in churches and tombs are not portrayals of Jesus on the cross, or the infant in the manger. Rather they picture Jesus as the gentle shepherd. And what may be one of the earliest paintings of all is of a very young Jesus, who has draped a lamb over his shoulders. 4I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.” (John 10:14)

Jesus’ description of what a good shepherd does and will do does not end there. When Jesus makes the claim that he is the good shepherd this can be quite shocking to his friends and followers. They had learned that the good shepherd is God. The scriptures were filled with images of God as the shepherd of his chosen people. To further startle them he tells them his Father knows him and he knows the Father and there are sheep that are not a part of the fold but he is there for them also and will hear his voice so he is the one shepherd and there will be one flock. God the Father loves him because he lays down his life for them so he can take it up again. Jesus gives up his life of his own accord and he has the power to take it up again-for the benefit oof all people.

In Acts the religious leaders seized Peter and John who were talking to people and teaching them and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They were upset because the one man they thought they had sacrificed for the good of the nation didn’t seem to have worked because Jesus had followers who were just as persistent and were just as troublesome. There were 5,000 who had heard the message and believed. So, they threw Peter and John in jail and questioned by what authority they had healed people. They were more concerned about their position and their reputations than in God. Since Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit he spoke boldly and flipped things on their head by taking the offensive by telling them the One they had crucified had risen again and quoted Psalm 18:22 when he said “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.” The one hey had rejected is now the capstone of the church and without them there would be no church and only through him could people be saved. This was in obedience to his Father.

The Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. Five times in eight short verses Jesus mentions laying down his life for the sake of the sheep and we3 are asked to do the same out of love. John is telling us real love isn’t about having a feeling but rather produces selfless, sacrificial giving. This entails giving ourselves for others. In order to serve others, one should not expect anything in return. Rodney Dangerfield once quipped “my problem is I appeal to everyone who can do absolutely nothing for me.’ When Jesus told us we are to love others as Jesus loved us and he gave his life for others he is saying even if we do not die for someone, we can practice sacrificial love by lending a listening ear, encouraging others, helping those who need it and giving to others. Laying down one’s life is not an act to be feared but an act that defies death, as we trust that, washed in the waters of baptism, we already live in the resurrected life of Christ.

Perhaps you can think of someone who needs this kind of love today and give it or even more. Love is all about word and action. We can reflect living in Christ as believing in Christ, but turning our words into action is required. This is not something to fear but an act that defies death, as we trust that, washed in the waters of baptism, we already live in the resurrected life of Christ.

St. Paul takes action as we love others. First of all, all are invited and welcome to be a part of our faith community where we strive to love others as Jesus loves us. Out food pantry feeds the hungry week in and week out. We supply useful kits to Advent House which they give to the homeless when they see the need. Weekly, a portion of our contributions end up going to Lutheran World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Recovery. Individuals give time and talent to those others as they see fit, knowing that our belief in Christ opens us to God’s unlimited grace where we will be found righteous and living in Christ gives us not only a rich life on earth but also an eternal life-we will be okay. Go in joy as you live your life in Christ. Amen.