

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Cycle A Good Shepherd Sunday Background on the Gospel



First Reading Acts of the Apostles 2:14a,36-41 Peter and the other apostles baptize 3,000 people.

Psalm Psalms 23:1-6 The Lord is my shepherd.

Second Reading 1 Peter 2:20b-25 We have been healed by the wounds of Christ.

Gospel John 10:1-10 Jesus is the gate for his sheep.

Background on the Gospel

This fourth Sunday of the Easter season is sometimes called Good Shepherd Sunday because in each of the three lectionary cycles, the Gospel reading invites us to reflect on Jesus as the Good Shepherd. In each cycle the reading is from the tenth chapter of John's Gospel. **This chapter sets the framework for Jesus' teaching about himself as the Good Shepherd.**

Today's reading falls between the stories of Jesus' healing of the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus. Both of these stories were proclaimed in the Gospels found in this year's season of Lent. Following the controversy that ensued when Jesus healed the man born blind, Jesus directs his allegory about the sheep and the shepherd toward the Jewish religious leaders of his time, the Pharisees.

Throughout John's Gospel **the Pharisees fail to accept Jesus' ministry and teaching.** They show themselves to be "robbers and thieves" because they try to lead the sheep without entering through the gate, Jesus. Through these metaphors, **Jesus is telling his listeners that those who follow him and his way will find abundant life.** He identifies himself both as **the shepherd and the gate. The shepherds who are faithful to him are the ones whom the sheep (Jesus' disciples) should follow.**

The relationship between the sheep and their shepherd is based on familiarity. Sheep recognize their shepherd and *will not follow a stranger.* At the end of the day, shepherds lead their sheep from pastures to a common gated area called a sheepfold. There, one shepherd protects all of the sheep until the next day when each shepherd returns to lead his own sheep to pasture. As shepherds move among the sheep, the sheep follow only their shepherd.



Today's Gospel also gives us the opportunity to reflect on Christian leadership. Jesus' words suggest to us that those who will lead the Christian community will be known by their faithfulness to Jesus. **The leaders will recognize that Jesus is the gate for all of the sheep and that having a good relationship with Jesus is the primary characteristic of a Christian leader.**

Jesus' allegory also suggests that **faithful Christian leadership requires a good relationship with the community:** the shepherd knows his sheep, and they know him.

Christian leaders follow the example of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, by being faithful to him and by being a good shepherd.

Doctrinal Content:

Profession of Faith	Sacraments / Liturgy	Christian Life
Jesus is the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls	Sacrament of Reconciliation	Being a disciple of Jesus / Following the example of Jesus

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Cycle A
Good Shepherd Sunday
Making the Connection 1, 2, & 3
Gospel : John 10:1-10 : Jesus is the gate for his sheep.



Concrete images help young children to identify with the words and teachings of Jesus. Jesus himself used such images in his teaching, as in today's Gospel. Children in our society have less familiarity with sheep and shepherds than did those who heard Jesus' words, but with some explanation, these images can help children to know what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

Materials Needed

- Shoebox ; Scissors; Tape; Pencils; Penny/Coin

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Prepare a shoebox in the following way. Cut out a one-inch semicircle at the bottom edge of both ends of a shoebox. Save the semicircles.
2. Show the children the shoebox. Using pencils as sticks and a penny as a puck, have the children take turns playing hockey. Give one point for each time they get the puck in their opponent's "goal." At the end of five minutes, stop the game.
3. Say: ***That game was fun. What if there were no holes in the box though?*** Tape the semicircles in place to cover the holes. Say: ***There would be no way to win the game.***
4. Say: ***In today's Gospel we hear that our life is sort of like this game. Let's listen to this week's Gospel and learn why.*** Read aloud John 10:1-10.
5. Ask: ***What did Jesus tell his disciples in today's Gospel?*** (Jesus talks about how sheep follow their shepherd and how the shepherd is the one who enters the sheepfold through the gate.)
Should the sheep follow the person who enters the sheepfold another way? (No)
6. Say: ***In this Gospel, Jesus is talking about how his followers will know to follow him and how he will protect them. When Jesus died for us, he opened the gates of heaven.*** Remove the tape from the semicircles. Say: ***As long as we believe in him and follow him, he will let us in.*** Push the penny through the hole.
7. Conclude in prayer together that we will be good followers of Jesus.

Pray together today's psalm, Psalm 23.

The LORD is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.
Fresh and green are the pastures
where he gives me repose.
Near restful waters he leads me;
he revives my soul. **R**
He guides me along the right path,
for the sake of his name.
Though I should walk in the valley of the shadow of death,
no evil would I fear, for you are with me.
Your crook and your staff will give me comfort. **R**
You have prepared a table before me
in the sight of my foes.
My head you have anointed with oil;
my cup is overflowing. **R**
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life.
In the LORD's own house shall I dwell
for length of days unending. **R**

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Cycle A
Good Shepherd Sunday
Making the Connection 4, 5 & 6
Gospel John 10:1-10 Jesus is the gate for his sheep.



Children in this age group are beginning to be able to identify the traits of a good leader. Jesus' teaching about what it means to be a good shepherd is often used as a model for Christian leadership. We can help children recognize and distinguish the characteristics of Christian leadership and invite children to adopt those character traits in their own lives.

Materials Needed A chalkboard and chalk OR A flip chart and pens

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. *The fourth Sunday of Easter is sometimes called **Good Shepherd Sunday** because in the Gospel reading for this Sunday, Jesus talks about what it means to be the shepherd of the sheep. He also **compares himself to the gate that sheep go through to get into the sheepfold**, the yard where they **stay at night for safety**.*

Almost everybody in Jesus' time knew about sheep and shepherding, and so when Jesus explained his ideas by talking about sheep, people understood.

In today's Gospel **he says that a good shepherd recognizes his sheep and that the sheep recognize and follow the shepherd.**

Today we still talk about shepherds **when we describe Christian leaders.**

Before we hear today's Gospel, let's talk a bit about what it means to be a good Christian leader.

2. **What are some characteristics that good Christian leaders share?** (Accept all reasonable answers.) Write the children's responses on the board. Say: We will return to these words in a moment.

Let's listen carefully to today's Gospel now to see what else we might add to this list. Remember that a sheepfold is an enclosed yard where a shepherd watches over his sheep. After a day in the pasture, shepherds bring their sheep to a sheepfold for the night. One shepherd guards the gate and protects the flock from thieves. In the morning, each of the shepherds leads his sheep out of the sheepfold and into the pasture.

3. Invite a volunteer to read aloud today's Gospel, John 10:1-10.
4. **What is the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep?** (The sheep recognize and follow the shepherd.)
How do the sheep know their shepherd? (He enters the sheepfold through the gate. The gatekeeper knows him. His voice is familiar.)

5. **Christian leaders are sometimes said to model themselves after the example of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.** Having heard today's Gospel, what can you add to our list of traits of good Christian leaders? (Accept all reasonable answers.)

6. Say: Good Christian leaders have a good relationship with Jesus. They know that Jesus is the gate for the sheep. **By knowing Jesus and faithfully following him, Christian leaders help the Church to follow Jesus.** In today's Gospel, Jesus reminds us that there is only one way to abundant life and that way is through him.

7. Conclude by praying together that we will all be faithful followers of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Pray together **today's psalm, Psalm 23.**



Fourth Sunday of Easter, Cycle A
Good Shepherd Sunday
Making the Connection 7, 8 & 9
Gospel John 10:1-10 Jesus is the gate for his sheep.

Young people at this age are beginning to identify the traits of a good leader. Jesus' teaching about what it means to be a good shepherd is often used as a model for Christian leadership. We can help the young people recognize the characteristics of Christian leadership and encourage them to adopt those character traits themselves.

Materials Needed None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Invite the young people to think about people who give direct service to their community in their daily jobs, such as a school principal, a coach, or a fire-fighter.
2. Then ask: ***What qualities does a good leader possess?*** (Accept all reasonable answers.)
3. Use their opinions and examples to point out that a good leader recognizes everyone's worth, talent, and ability.
4. ***A shepherd is someone who leads. In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus explains the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep.***
5. Invite a volunteer to read aloud today's Gospel, John 10:1-10.
6. ***What is the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep?*** (The sheep recognize and follow the shepherd.)
How do the sheep know their shepherd? (He enters the sheepfold through the gate. The gatekeeper knows him. His voice is familiar.)
7. ***Good Christian leaders have a good relationship with Jesus. They know that Jesus is the gate for the sheep. By knowing Jesus and faithfully following him, Christian leaders help the Church follow Jesus. In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus reminds us that there is only one way to abundant life and that way is through him.***
8. Conclude by praying together that we will all be faithful followers of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Pray together today's psalm, Psalm 23.



