

**New Life Episcopal Church
Uniontown, OH**

**A Sermon for the 4th Sunday after Easter
April 26, 2026**



Christ the shepherd

The Rev Barbara Bond

Click Here for today's Readings:
[Fourth Sunday of Easter – The Episcopal Church](#)

John 10:1-10

He calls us by name

The fourth Sunday of Easter Season is always about sheep. Every year preachers get to tangle with the metaphor of Jesus the Good Shepherd. One of the beauties of St. John's Gospel writing is its poetic quality. It is never concrete, always shifting a bit, urging us to see the language and message of Jesus as something bigger, larger, and not necessarily clearly defined. Remember when Nicodemus came to visit Jesus by night and kept demanding concrete explanations? And Jesus drifted off with wonderful figures of speech, leaving the literal approach of Nicodemus dangling. And it was all wonderful, helping us give up our own literal interpretations and expand our minds too.

We have had three Sundays about encounters with the Risen Christ. On Easter Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene met Jesus in the tomb garden, but she did not recognize him until he called her by name. The next Sunday we heard about Jesus coming to the remaining disciples in the evening after his resurrection and they all rejoiced, except Thomas, who was not there. Jesus came back a week later and invited Thomas into relationship. On the third Sunday, we heard about two followers of Jesus who did not recognize him on the road to Emmaus until they broke bread together. This week we hear about sheep following the shepherd, a metaphor for our following Christ. Jesus says that he calls all the sheep by name, and they follow him.

I heard a wonderful story about sheep and their shepherd from my colleague Rev. Brian Wilbert, whom you all know as a stalwart member of the clergy in our Diocese. Brian gives me permission to tell you this story, which I have edited lightly. Brian begins:

"In 2009 it was my privilege to spend part of a sabbatical journey in a continuing education class offered by St. George's College in Jerusalem called "the Palestine of Jesus." In the course of two weeks we were taken to all the places most of us had only heard about in church or from our reading and study of scripture. One of the places we visited was Bethlehem. On a hill not far from Bethlehem is the place designated as Shepherd's Field...the traditional place where the Angelic choir awakened those watching over their flocks by night. It was there I met a bonafide Bethlehem shepherd. We were having lunch in a large open-air eatery under a tent and suddenly the sound of small bells permeated the air.... Up over the hill appeared a flock of perhaps 40 black, white, and brown sheep and goats. They were being shepherded by a very tall man riding on the back of a donkey.He carried not a shepherd's crook but a big stick which he used to gently guide his flock along the way. ..He was accompanied by a dog, ..who assisted in directing the sheep toward the shepherd...

"While I was speaking with my Bethlehem Shepherd through our interpreter, I observed that the sheep had gathered around him (again, with the help of his canine companion) and were munching on what little green they could find in that arid climate. The

Shepherd began calling out words, which of course I could not understand, and one by one the sheep would look up from their grazing and stare at the shepherd. My interpreter informed me that the Shepherd was demonstrating how each sheep had a name and upon hearing the Shepherd call their name, each sheep responded. Right there in 2009 in Shepherd's Field just outside of Bethlehem, today's Gospel reading from John came alive for me. After a couple of photo ops, my Bethlehem Shepherd took his donkey, and his dog and began climbing back up the hill. And just like that, the sheep began to follow him."

Thank you, Rev Brian Wilbert, for this beautiful story. I too felt while I was in Israel in 1992 that our tradition, scriptural images and stories were all pulling me and embracing me with love and unforgettable experiences.

I love the idea that Jesus knows my name and calls me to follow him, that he calls all of us by name, that he knows us all. We don't just follow him blindly – we follow him because we know him, too.

All of these shepherding images work for us, because we are so desperate for comfort and safety. This is a dangerous world – it always has been – and we gather together for safety, comfort, love, community, and faith, in a safe place, surrounded by walls of faith, hope and love. Our gate is open to all comers, and it swings both ways – we invite in new members to Christ's sheepfold, and we go out, led by the love of Christ, to bring Christ's message of love to the outside.

You know the blessing I sometimes invoke:

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May God give you the grace never to sell yourself short,

Grace to risk something big for something good,

Grace to remember that the world is now
too dangerous for anything but truth
and too small for anything but love.

So, may God take our minds and think through them,

May God take our lips and speak through them,

May God take our hearts and set them on fire
with God's goodness, love and truth.