



Lutheran Church of the Master, 4800 Ramsey Road, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho  
Pastor Neal Buckaloo  
Sunday, May 15, 2011, The Fourth Sunday of Easter  
"Abundant Life"

Voices, hearing voices, a discordant, disputatious, frictional chorus of shouting, haranguing voices – political commentators, strident religionists, 'free' advice which offers no freedom, no gateway. Contentious voices ring out clamoring to be heard, to be noticed, taking their small piece of truth to the absurd. Are you weary of words, words, words; analysis that lives in half-truth or less?

We expect more of ourselves. We expect more of others. There can be no wholeness if I take a partial truth and distort it into the whole; if I take one of many principles and make it the only principle that matters. During these times, we live in a clamoring world –billboards, pop-up adds on the web, shrill voices on the radio, unsolicited sale or charity phone calls, all this with the disharmony going on in the world as background noise.

It has happened before. Certainly in the struggle to establish child labor laws and employee rights during the first half of the twentieth century. In the decades prior to and following the Civil War in this country, the country was divided North and South but also in communities and neighborhoods. Even brothers fought against each other. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as the 13 colonies moved into the American Revolution, there were those who remained committed and loyal to King George III of England. We live in a world prone to this discord. As creatures of the earth, universally we know a great deal about making war but are limited in our ability to make meaningful peace.

This was true in the ancient world as well. Hear the words of Isaiah the prophet in Judah 600 years before Jesus was born. <sup>Ezekiel 34: 2</sup> *Mortal, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel [the shepherds were the religious and civil leaders of Judah]: prophesy, and say to them-- . . . Thus says the Lord God: Ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? <sup>3</sup> You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. <sup>4</sup> You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them. <sup>5a</sup> So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd.*

We hear the contrasting words of David's 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd..." and we hear these words of Jesus in the Gospel today, <sup>John 10:7b</sup> *"Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup> I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."*

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is a song of comfort and safety, even in the face of great danger. We hear in this Psalm <sup>4</sup> *Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me. <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.* In the face of deadly threat or great danger, God is with us. When we are filled with fear and dread, it is difficult, at times near impossible, to see that indeed God is with us. In fact our spirit can be thrown to the way of the world, overwhelmed by the forces at work to destroy or to diminish. This Psalm, like other psalms in scripture, speaks to God's nurture and presence especially when we are consumed by the fear surrounding us.

Jesus speaks in the passage in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel for today of his being the gate to the sheepfold. The sheepfold is the place of safety; the place of a secure night's rest. The gate can literally be a human being. Often the sheepfold consisted of a rock-walled enclosure in which several flocks were brought by shepherds for safe keeping. Jesus says, <sup>9b</sup> *"Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."*

What is the abundant life the world offers? The world measures the abundant life in political power, influence, and wealth. All which are accessible only at great human cost. This contrasts to the abundant life Jesus speaks of, as he has paid the cost with his death and resurrection. The abundant life God offers comes to us and our world in opposition to the discord and stridency of the world in which we live.

The abundant life in Christ is God's work for the world. Our task is not to seek some isolated, personal peace but a peace which is filled with Christ, is filled with community, and is for the whole world. And you are enlisted as agents. It is God's work, our hands and Christ's gift. Amen.