**4 Easter, May 11, 2014;** [**Acts 2:42-47**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+2%3A42-47&version=NRSV)**;**[**Psalm 23**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+23&version=NRSV)**;**[**1 Peter 2:19-25**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2%3A19-25&version=NRSV)**;**[**John 10:1-10**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+10%3A1-10&version=NRSV)**. Rev Mary Trainor**

There was a job opening for "Director of Operations." Interviews took place. You can see them on a YouTube video. The interviewees were told that the job would require them to be on their feet constantly, and that a high level of stamina was required. Most of them nodded their heads and were OK with this. Then they were told that the job involves an unlimited number of hours a week, night time sleep interruptions, no breaks, excellent interpersonal skills, the ability to function in a chaotic environment, experience in the culinary arts, medicine, mathematics, English, and management. The interviewees then just sat there aghast. But wait, that is not all! Then they were told that there are no vacation days for this position, and during holiday periods the work load actually increases. Oh, and the work is "*pro bono*" - in other words, there is no pay. The interviewees came right out and said they couldn't believe that anyone would actually take this impossible job! Then, they were told that lots of people currently hold this position, and meet every requirement. This is a job description of a mother. Whew! Today is Mother's Day. Mother's Day is a day we honor the women who have this impossibly difficult job way outside their comfort zones. It comes both with huge rewards and enormous responsibility. We are grateful for our mothers, after all we would not be here without them! As we think about mothers, we also give thanks for Jesus' mother. If she had not said "yes" to the angel where would we be today? She faced unique challenges as a mother. We know she endured unspeakable hardships for her son: shame, ridicule. We know she was protective of Him and tried to guide Him, and was with Him to the end. How did she even do it? Today's Scriptures tell us how, she and we as followers of Christ, can get through tough times.

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. When we think of Jesus the Good Shepherd what comes to mind is a peaceful rural scene where Jesus is walking with sheep. It is very familiar, maybe too much so - as familiarity can prevent us to being open to learning. Roy Heller, who teaches Old Testament at Perkins School of Theology, warns his students "**not to confuse familiarity with understanding**." So yes, let's take a fresh look at Jesus as the Good Shepherd, leading us (the sheep). Jesus, like that scene depicts, does bring peace and comfort to us. But this outlook is incomplete: it only shows one situation; life is not all strolling through pretty rolling hills on a sunny day. There is much more: hungry predators, bad weather, not enough food, competition, getting lost, injuries, sickness, and so on. The Good News is that Jesus in the midst of all of those too. In the last verse in our Gospel Jesus says, "***I came that (you) may have life, and have it abundantly***." Jesus is the safe pasture in which we attain abundant life. We would just as soon leave it at that, but as we read the whole Gospel story, we also see that Jesus leads us out of the sheepfold: away from our comfortable places. God ***calls us by name and leads us to new places, new challenges. He goes ahead*** of us, leading us to new ways to serve Him, to share His message of love through our thoughts, words, and deeds. God calls us out of our comfort, into a life fully lived in and for Him. It might be scary in these new places, but the Good Shepherd is in our midst and is stalwart, not scared of danger or threats. The Good Shepherd is totally motivated by one thing: love, and He is real. We, His sheep, find life (true life, abundant life) through Him, in His care.

This calling is to us as individuals and to us as a community, as shown in our 1st reading today from the book of Acts. In it we heard about God working through the early church of the 1st Century. We are told, "***They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*** ***Awe came upon everyone***." They truly experienced the awe of a real and personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They were sustained with the sacrament, bible study, prayer, community, worship. Their relationship with God defined how they lived and interacted, and others were drawn in. It was because of their faithfulness that we are here today, that we heard the message of salvation. They faced huge struggles and persecutions compared to what we face today; they were a tight community facing them together, under God.

Our Epistle from 1st Peter speaks to these tough times. We read, "***But if you endure, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, ... follow in His steps.....entrust(ing) ourselves to God."*** Back to our relationship with God, the Good Shepherd! We are called to go outside of our comfort zones, but God is going to lead us and help us endure if we trust in Him. Sure, we will mess up -but God will help us get back up. Peter said, "***For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and*** ***guardian of our souls***!" The 23rd Psalm, which we recited today, captures eloquently what God does as the guardian of our souls. It contains nine specific things God does to help us persevere. "***He makes me lie down in green pastures***," "***He leads me beside still waters"*** (*in other words, God brings us to a place of calmness and peace*). And, when we are down and discouraged and don't know where to turn, we are told "***He revives my soul and guides me along right pathways***." Then, we are told to "***fear no evil***" because He is "***with***" us and He "***comfort(s)***" us, "***anoint***(s)" us. And, we are "***running over***" with His love. As we follow Christ into new adventures of serving Him, we are taken to a new place of reassurance and strength -- to abundant life.

We are in a new time in our church, and with a new time comes new opportunities. We have a new bishop, and as Dean I have been meeting with him and already see how God working through him. It is Easter season, when we especially live into the Resurrection, into the victory of life as Christ defeated death. We have new opportunities to get involved here at St John's. As in the 1st century church, when we serve God alongside one another we see the face of Christ, we experience that awe.

The Good Shepherd is leading us out of the sheepfold, and He will be with us no matter what. Will you entrust yourself to Him and be open to His call, His leading?

Let us pray today's collect together: **O God, whose Son Jesus is the Good Shepherd of your people, grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name and follow where he leads, who with you and the Holy Spirit live and reigns one God forever and ever. Amen.**