

“God’s Homecoming” – Deacon Rich Wilson -Easter 5 – 04.26.2026

Perhaps you, like me, have used the word “Homecoming” (specifically, *home going*) to comfort a family that has experienced the death of a loved one. Most of my training as a hospital chaplain and deacon was about what words not to use in that kind of ministry.

“Homecoming” is a good word to use.

NT Wright, the famous New Testament scholar and Anglican Bishop, approaches “Homecoming” from a different angle.

In his 2026 book, “God’s Homecoming,” Bishop Wright makes the case that “Homecoming” is not as much about “us” going home to God – heaven – as it is about the “The *Triune* God (coming) down to us in the *ultimate* ‘Homecoming.’” You can pick up Wright’s book if you want to explore his case for “Homecoming.”

On *this Good Shepherd Sunday*, I’ll rely on King David and Jesus to make the *good* Bishop’s point.

You just heard Psalm 23.

“The LORD is my shepherd;

I shall not be in want.”

Remember, this is the Old Testament, and King David’s beloved Psalm tells us about life under the care of Yahweh – the Lord and Shepherd.

This life is truly blessed – *with*:

- green pastures
- still waters
- right pathways

- a bountiful table
- (heads) anointed with oil...

“*Surely* (Yahweh’s) goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

That is a “for ever,” an eternity, *all* of us can *live* in and for.

And that sounds *like* “God’s Homecoming” to me.

In the New Testament – don’t *forget*, it’s *Good Shepherd Sunday* – Jesus boldly proclaims that *He* is the *Good Shepherd*.

You didn’t hear that in the Gospel I just read from John chapter 10 – but that’s only because I stopped at verse 10. You have to wait till verse 11 to hear Jesus describe Himself the same way King David describes Yahweh – as “shepherd:”

“I am the *good* shepherd,” Jesus says.

So, let let’s go to today’s Gospel and see if we can find *a* continuing example of “God’s Homecoming.”

Jesus uses a “figure of speech” to introduce the *Good Shepherd* in John 10:

“The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because *they* know his voice.”

Of course the Jews do not understand Jesus, so he tries to explain further:

“I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture.”

The gate? I thought Jesus was the “shepherd” in this story?

Well it’s “both/and;” Jesus is the “shepherd” and the “gate.”

Welcome to the sheepfold.

In ancient *near* Eastern sheepfolds, the gate was not a wooden door but a gap in a stone wall in the countryside. At night the shepherd would literally lie across the opening, becoming the physical barrier to keep the sheep in, and predators out.

So when Jesus says he is the “gate,” He is positioning Himself as both the *protector* of the sheep; and, the only point of *access* to the sheep.

A day in the life at the sheepfold is one of coming and going – under the protection of Jesus – as the sheep follow the voice of their master leading them out to “lush pastures,” an “abundant life.”

Jesus is also the “gate.” Jesus is the only way in *to* safety and out to pasture – the gate *to* God’s Kingdom. As Jesus says:

“I am the way and the truth and the life. *No one* comes to the Father except through me.”

All of this a *grand metaphor* for the life Jesus wants us to have; that He gave his *life for us to* have.

I’m with NT Wright. God has come home.

“God’s Homecoming” begins in the Old Testament,

“(Yaweh): revives my soul...I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

“God’s Homecoming” *continues* in the New Testament.

“The *good* shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

And the *Good* Shepherd provides us with:

An Identity *personally* known to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

- Sanctuary
- Protection
- Freedom
- Spiritual and Physical Provision
- Abundance

It’s all there, “God’s Homecoming” *in* a sheepfold: an intimate relationship with the Shepherd, the *Good* Shepherd, and everything we need to live “the way, the truth, and the life.”

It is indeed *Good Shepherd Sunday*. Alleluia! Alleluia!