

The Fourth Sunday of Easter [C]

May 12, 2019

Haven Lutheran Church

Readings: Psalm 23; John 10: 11-21

*Grace and peace to you through God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen*

Dear Hudson,

Today is Mother's Day, Shepherd Sunday and the day of your baptism. Probably the only one of those that mean anything to you today is the first. You have a wonderful Mom who carried you inside herself for nine months and now carries you in her arms. She will carry you in her heart forever. When you are old enough, be sure to give her lots of hugs and kisses and thanks every Mother's Day... and actually, every day. A grateful person will be a joy and have eyes for finding joys .

The other two occasion of today — Shepherd Sunday and your Baptism — are tied together, though we can not claim the credit for that coincidence. I know it will be a while before you will be able to understand the significance of this day. Honestly, it will take a lifetime because we keep learning new stuff and have new “ahhh” moments that expand our understanding. And the truth is, God the Good Shepherd is not one we can “figure out” like legos or a math problem or riding a bike. God is not something to be mastered but someONE we learn to love, trust and cherish. And baptism? I once read baptism is like giving an infant an adult sized sweater to wear — they will have to grow into it with the help of their parents, grandparents, god parents and church family. Treat your faith in God as a journey not a destination and you will enjoy the trip much more.

Now, you might be wondering, who is this God I'm talking about? And if God is a shepherd how can we be sheep when we don't look like any lamb you've seen in your nursery or children's books. See, you are smart already, asking such questions, Hudson. Let me start with who is God. God is the Creator of all things good, including you. God made this world — the blue skies and clouds; sandy shores and Georgia clay; streams, lakes, oceans and the water in your bathtub; trees, flowers and vegetables like your Dad grows in his garden that your parents will try to convince you to eat. God created birds, animals, insects and reptiles — though some of us think God might have made a mistake when he made snakes and mosquitoes. God

created the stars, planets, moons and galaxies far, far away and you, Hudson, one of the newest good creations that God declares very good. Why did God do this? Because God is so very full of love that God wanted to share that love — God didn't want to keep such good love to God's self but show and share it. So God made the world and us to know love and all the good things love makes possible.

Ever since God created us, God has been trying to stay close and help us live in a way that would help all people to know the love and bounty of the world. God even went as far as to live among us in Jesus, a man who walked on this earth thousands of year ago. When you hear stories about Jesus, Hudson, you are seeing the very nature and qualities of our amazing God. Jesus showed us that God loves everyone ---- even the people others don't. When we watch Jesus, we see what God wants for us. Jesus fed, healed, forgave, included, reached out, stood up against wrong, never forced himself on any one, didn't give up on loving, and even went as far as dying rather than let anyone hurt his friends or make him become someone he was not. That's why I love Jesus, Hudson. He not only shows us what God is like, he also shows us what we humans can be like at our best. Jesus shows us how to live so we can make the world more like the good creation God intended it to be.

Still wondering where the Shepherd comes in? Jesus told a story trying to help people understand who God was. He used a shepherd who cares for a flock of sheep in his story. But this was not an ordinary shepherd. This shepherd loved every single sheep — even those who didn't know him yet. He loved them so much he would die for them. (Sound familiar?) We are not wooly sheep, Hudson, but we are creatures who need the help, wisdom and love of a good shepherd to guide us in this life. It's so easy to go down harmful pathways and follow the wrong voices. Your parents will be doing all they can to help you avoid that and to choose God's good and life-giving ways. Despite what some might try to tell you, Hudson, God's good and life-giving ways do not exclude a lot of fun. Just look at the giraffe, porcupine or platypus — God has a great sense of humor. Look at a really starry night, a rainbow or the Grand Canyon. Wait until you taste ice cream, crab-cakes or french fries. God has provided plenty of ways to enjoy life and not hurt ourselves or any one else. Follow the right shepherd, Hudson.

Now, baptism. I've already told you that God created and loves you. You first learn about the power of that love from your parents. It's a love that won't ever let go. It's a love that sees the best in you and encourages you to grow it. It's a love that we call unconditional ---- which means no matter what, that love is still there. We have another word for the kind of love God has for us. We call it grace — the unearned, undeserved, unconditional love of God. God freely gives love to us because that is what God is made of and what God does. At baptism, God declares for the whole world that you are his child, loved fully, perfectly, completely and forever by the God -- -- Creator, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. You still are the child of your parents and you are God's child, too. You are still a part of the Potter-Pizzini family and you are part of another family, too ---- God's family — that huge flock of non-furry sheep of the Good Shepherd which includes people from all around the world, people of the past, present and future, people you know and people you will never meet, people you will like and people you may not like. God loves every single one of us in God's family.

There are some other things that happen at your baptism. Your parents, godparents and family make promises to help you learn about God and God's ways and love. To help them, there are communities of people called "church". When Jesus was no longer here on earth, he told his followers to carry on his work of loving the world into the good way it was created to be. That is what a church is suppose to be. A group of people who love God, keep learning about God, do their best to love each other and every one else like Jesus did. I'll be honest with you, Hudson, there are churches where that is not done well. We humans can make a mess of even good things like loving God and loving. But it is worth the effort to find a church community that is trying to do it right — they will be another family for you, another place you learn about love, practice loving and help make the world a better place. Good music, laughter and good food also seem to find their ways into the good examples of church. Don't let the "churchy" language or wordy creeds or sleepy sermons get in your way. You may, also, have to overlook some of God's children who have forgotten how to be joyful about being loved by God. Be patient with them and help them remember. Concentrate on soaking up the love and leaning into serving God's saving

work and you will find great meaning, peace and support in good and bad times. Church doesn't replace that stellar Pizzini-Potter family you have, Hudson. It's an addition that brings another kind of richness, support and purpose into life.

There's so much more exciting, baffling and wonder-filled things to know about God, being loved by God and trying to live in the fullness of that love. But that doesn't happen all at once. Faith in God unfolds throughout our lifetime. It's a gift that we keep unpacking. We discover gifts within the gifts. "So let's get on with it," you, your parents and the entire polite congregation are likely thinking. To that I say Welcome, Hudson Potter Pizzini, child of God, you are wonderfully made, dearly loved and precious in God's sight. Welcome to the family of God forever. To that may all God's children say, "Amen." (Amen.)

Linda M Alessandri 5/10/19