

April 25, 2021

Good Shepherd Sunday

Christ Episcopal Church, Dallas

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Easter

### Safe in His Hands

Thursday, April 19, 1995 and Monday, April 15, 2013. Two beautiful spring days, eighteen years apart. Two days when the world changed for people in Oklahoma City and Boston. Two days when the unthinkable happened. Two days that tested our sense of safety. Two days that tested our faith.

April 19, 1995 was the date of the Oklahoma City bombing at the Federal Murrah Building. One hundred and sixty eight people perished that day. Living in Oklahoma City at the time and during those days that followed the bombing, I experienced one of the few times in my life when I questioned my faith. So many deaths, so many babies died. What could possibly be the reason for this terrible devastation? Where was God in this sorrow?

Eighteen years later in Boston at the annual Boston Marathon a similar senseless tragedy took place. I had lived in Boston for five years and always loved the celebration of Patriot's Day. You never knew if it would snow or you would get a sunburn as you watched those runners run through the streets of Boston. It was always a time of celebration

for families and communities. Boston is a city of neighborhoods where people share the details of their daily lives with each other – from first communion to baseball games. There are no strangers, and they care for each other in good times and in bad times. And like Oklahoma City, Boston became a small town in the response to their shared grief.

How do these events help us to understand the message of The Good Shepherd?

First, the image of The Good Shepherd is not an image intended to comfort children. It is an image intended to inspire the faith of adults in difficult times.

It is an image meant to counter forces that would isolate us from each other and undermine their faith in Christ.

Jesus made three promises to his followers. He promised them everlasting life. If they accepted him and followed him, they would have the life of God in them. Jesus also promised them a life that would know no end. Death would not be the end but the beginning; they would know the glory of indestructible life. Jesus promised a life that was secure. Jesus said that nothing would snatch them out of his hand, not even sorrow and death, since his is everlasting life itself. Our lives are safe in his hands.

When we are challenged by sorrow and situations whose depths we cannot begin to understand, it is our faith which inspires us to draw

together and remember the peace and security of unending life and joy with God.

John's Gospel always addresses readers in the plural. These texts were meant to be read aloud in group worship. His Gospel messages are brief, colorful and memorable. In times of testing and persecution, in small geographically is

olated communities of believers, these brief, bold affirmations of Jesus' identity enabled them to hold onto their common faith. This was true then and it is true now.

It is at these times of common grief and emotional isolation that we need to remember the words of John's Gospel. These words are here to bring us together, to bind us to the promises of Jesus and to help us to work against those forces of evil that threaten to isolate us from God and each other.

We live in community and we will rise in community. We belong to each other and we belong to our God.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, you are the Good Shepherd who keeps watch over our lives. May we be ever attentive to your voice and submit fully to your wise

rule for our lives. Draw us nearer to you that we may always find peace and joy in your presence.

Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

AMEN