

(soft music) (audience member coughs) (soft music) (audience member coughs) (soft music) (audience member coughs) (audience member coughs) (soft music) (quick footsteps) (soft music) (organ music) (choir singing off mic)

- Greetings to you from the Lord God Almighty, creator of earth and the heavens. We gather here today to worship God, and to that same and only God we present our fears and our hopes, regarding the boycott of the summer Olympics regarding the production of the MX Missile, regarding our concern for the studies in which we are again involved, our plans for a summer change of pace, our desire to hear afresh God's word of chastisement, forgiveness, direction, encouragement. Come let us eagerly worship God, and to God let us make our honest confession of our sin. (audience rustling) Oh God, the source of our being, our very destiny. The guide of our pilgrim days. By your power is Jesus raised to be Savior of all people, Lord of all nations, but now we confess other allegiances. Too often we give our substance to capture the mirage, our affections to things that perish. We are careless in our relationships with others. We would rather believe the rumor, than be set free by the truth. So now, we cry pardon for idolatries, mercy upon our failures, make us a people who lives to bare you, women and men who heed Jesus's call to lively discipleship. In the name of him who is the Christ, and brother to all, Amen. For this declaration is true and worthy of our acceptance. That Christ Jesus came into the world to redeem sinners. Our sin we have confessed, our desire to be forgiven we have acknowledged. Our longing to be changed we have proclaimed. Praise be to God for the miracles of pardon, of restoration, of new strength. Through Jesus Christ these miracles happen. In him and through him, we are forgiven. Let us give thanks for God is good, and God's love is everlasting. Thanks be to God who's love creates us. Thanks be to God who's mercy redeems us. Thanks be to God who's grace leads us into the future. To parents, to students returning for summer classes, to newlyweds, to those into their marriages for many years, to each of you and to all of you, in Christ name greeting on this fourth Sunday at Easter. It is good to have you worship in this place, to be apart of the worship of God. To hear God's word proclaimed. And a special word of welcome to the Immaculate Conception Ringers and Bell Choir and to their director. It is a delight to have their music in the chapel this morning, music at once grand and so very delicate. We thank you for being here this day.

- Let us pray. Oh Lord our God, open our eyes, that we may behold wondrous things in your word. And let the words of my mouth, and the mediations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, our strength and our redeemer, amen. The Old Testament lesson is the 23rd Psalm. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness, for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies. Though anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Here ends the reading from the Old Testament. The epistle lesson is from 1 Peter 2:19-25. For one is approved if mindful of God he endures pain while suffering unjustly. For what credit is if when you do wrong

and are beaten for it you take it patiently? But, if you right and suffer for it, you take it patiently, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, no guile was found in his lips. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but he trusted to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed, for you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls. Here ends the reason from the epistle lesson. (audience rustling) (soft music) (soft footsteps) Will the congregation please stand for the reading of the gospel lesson? The gospel lesson is from John 10:1-10. Truly, truly I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. This figure Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying, so Jesus again said to them, truly, truly I say to you I am the door of the sheep, all who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not heed them. I am the door, if anyone enters by me he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. Here ends the reading from the gospel lesson, amen. (organ music) (choir singing off mic) Let us pray. Oh Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, our strength and our redeemer, amen. The time between Easter and Pentecost has been called the Significant Pause by Karl Barth. The lessons today for us, about the shepherd images in scripture, lift up an essential part of our life of faith together as a community. Together, for me, they have functioned like a kaleidoscope of images about Jesus, and hearing them anew, I hope that they can help us to remember who Jesus is. I'm struck by the fact that Jesus had a way with language. It seemed in his hand, figures of speech exploded into new meaning. Just when we think we can predict a conclusion from Jesus' words, the meaning itself shifts, and the image, like the colors and patterns of a kaleidoscope. And like the original hearers, just when we feel like we have grasped the true meaning, Jesus seems to break it open, turn it over for us, and it explodes again for us in his careful hand. He took the objects that were most familiar in his listeners lives, and he gave them new depth of meaning. This is exactly what happens as Jesus shares his insight on the familiar figures of sheep and shepherds. In John's gospel we are shepherds, and yet we are also sheep, Jesus is gate, and Jesus is shepherd, Jesus is shepherd and lamb. The sheep are guarded, and yet they are led to slaughter. Jesus makes it clear to us that there is simply no imagery that can satisfy either the glory or the anguish that he has for his people. According to John, the images that Jesus presents of himself are the door and the shepherd. Now they are both characteristic in our ears of biblical language. Long before the time of Jesus, King David was himself described as the shepherd ruler of his nation. Moses too was acclaimed in pastoral language in the Old Testament as shepherding a flock, the children of God. But primarily for Israel, the God Yahweh had been the true shepherd of his people, portrayed unforgettably in the shepherd's Psalm which we heard read for us this morning. But in the New Testament then it is Christ himself who becomes identified as the good shepherd, the one who finally gave his life for the sheep. The parable that Jesus speaks, seems to me to contain some acid criticisms of false shepherds, or what he called thieves and robbers. It reminds of similar prophetic indictments of incompetent leadership. The evangelist John probably had in mind both the bogus messiahs of his time, and some of the more headstrong leaders

of the church in his day. Perhaps they fulfilled in the original hearing, the warning words of our Lord, beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous as wolves. Today I'm aware that a rural Appalachian town in Kentucky is still reeling from the shock of discovering that a man without a license has been practicing medicine in their community now at their mission hospital for a year and a half. This particular man had worked for another doctor in another state, and upon the death of that physician, he forged his own medical credentials. These simple mountain people had placed their faith in him, had taken him at his word, and indeed had entrusted their lives to him, and now they are stunned and crushed. It seems that society is never without its messianic pretenders, and salvation hucksters. The scriptures remind us that only Christ is the good shepherd. He alone will lay down his life for the sheep, and this he does in the eyes of John, willingly and gladly. For his only concern is their welfare. The true leader among us must share that spirit of sacrificial service, concerned for the welfare of all those in his or her care, rather than for personal safety or prestige. I'm reminded that on the occasion of my ordination a favorite aunt of mine gave me a present of a statue. The statue is a shepherdess enfolding a lamb to her breast, and in that image for me says that always it is the servant's role and that of a shepherd to be in ministry, and I hope that I shall never forget that image. Alternating with this appealing figure of the good shepherd for us in the scriptures is yet another figure, for to speak of Christ as the door to the sheepfold begins to sound rather strange to our ears, but in a simple agrarian society this was also a familiar word picture. To speak of Christ as the door is also a striking way of describing the gathering of the people of God. And the church itself, within the security of this fold, is under God's and Christ's protection. What Jesus was trying to say in even using this language though, is that the door is also a means of exit, as well as entrance. For the sheep go in and they come out. The church and this chapel too, whose doors only open inward and not outward, will become an insulated ghetto. That kind of church will simply be a refuge from the world, rather than an entrance into it. The people of God must not only be called together to worship in the community of the church, but somehow we must also be involved in a society where the good shepherd is abundantly at work. Now for many of us I'm aware that sheep and shepherds are not familiar images for us out of our own experience. If you are anything like me, most of my contact with sheep has occurred in petting zoos in different communities across our country, and I'm aware then for many of us it is quite possible to end up with a romanticized view of what life must have been like for the Palestinian shepherd and the woolly lambs. I remember distinctly, being in a classroom one day where a group of us were trying in vain to relate, to really experience the shepherd image of scripture. Our professor was attempting mightily to open our eyes and minds to a new experience, but then something else happened. A quiet voice spoke from the back row of the room, "I was a shepherd boy while growing up". It was the voice of Henry Mizerewah, who was an exchange student to us from Zimbabwe. Henry began talking, and he filled us with stories from his childhood of what it meant to be a shepherd. He talked to us about being alone at a young age, of tending his flock, of providing and finding their pasture, of leading them through dangers and storms, of clearing away endlessly poisonous plants so that they could graze on safe pasture, of nursing and binding up their wounds, of delivering their lambs.