

(church organ plays)

- Good morning. We'd like to welcome you to Duke Chapel for this fourth Sunday of Easter. We are grateful to the Charlotte Children's Choir for their participation in the service of worship, for their director Ms. Sandy Holland, and their accompanist, Ms. Catherine Holland, and look forward to their musical participation in our service. Also, I'd like to say a word of thanks to the Reverend Dan Via for his participation as the presiding minister for today. And also to Ms. Emily Guerry, who is our lector. And now let us continue our worship. (gentle piano music) ♪ Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice ♪ (muffled singing) ♪ Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice ♪ (muffled singing) ♪ Unto Christ the king ♪ ♪ Praises now we bring ♪ ♪ Hymns of gladness sing forever ♪ ♪ Unto Christ the king ♪ ♪ Praises now we bring ♪ ♪ Hymns of gladness sing forever ♪ ♪ Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice ♪ (muffled singing) ♪ Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice ♪ (muffled singing)

- Please rise for the call to worship. Let us praise our God who tends us like sheep. (congregation chants) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us. (congregation chants) (church organ plays cheerfully)

- Let us pray. Good Shepherd who calls us by name and leads us in the way you would have us go, grant the wisdom, devotion, and courage to follow you. We would dare to be disciples who are learning patience and generosity, that we might share with others the abundant life you are revealing to us. Add to our number daily those who are being saved. Amen. Please be seated.

- Let us join together in the prayer for illumination. Open our hearts and minds, O God, by the power of your holy spirit so that, as the Word is read and proclaimed, we may hear your message with joy this day. Amen. The first lesson is from the first letter of St. Peter, the second chapter, the 19th through the 25th verses. "For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, "you endure pain while suffering unjustly. "If you endure, when you are beaten for doing wrong, "what credit is that? "But, if you endure when you do right, "and suffer for it, "you have God's approval. "For to this you have been called, "because Christ also suffered for you, "leaving you an example "so that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, "and no deceit was found in his mouth. "When he was abused, he did not return abuse. "When he was suffered, he did not threaten. "But he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, "so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness. "By his wounds you have been healed, "for you were going astray like sheep, "but now you have returned to the shepherd "and guardian of your souls." This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

- The psalm for this morning is number 23. It is found on page 754 of the hymnal. Will you please stand and we will read responsibly. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Congregation: The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures.

- Leads me beside still waters, restores my life.

Congregation: Leads me in the right paths for the sake of the Lord's name.

- Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil.

Congregation: For you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

- You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

Congregation: You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.

- Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

Congregation: And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord as long as I live. (church organ plays) ♪ Glory be to our Creator ♪ ♪ Praise to our Redeemer ♪ ♪ Glory be to our Sustainer ♪ ♪ Ever three and ever one ♪ ♪ As it was in the beginning ♪ ♪ Now and evermore shall be ♪

- Please be seated.

- The second lesson today is from the book of Acts, the second chapter, the 42nd through 47th verses. "They devoted themselves to the Apostle's teaching "and fellowship, "to the breaking of bread and prayers. "All came upon everyone, "because many wonders and signs were being done "by the apostles. "All who believed were together "and had all things in common. "They would sell their possessions and goods "and distribute the proceeds to all, "as any had need. "Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, "they broke bread at home, "and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, "praising God, and having the good will "of all the people. "And, day by day, the Lord added to their number "those who were being saved." This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God. (church organ plays brightly) (piano plays gently) ♪ All things bright and beautiful ♪ ♪ All creatures great and small ♪ ♪ All things wise and wonderful ♪ ♪ The Lord God made them all ♪ ♪ Each little flower that opens ♪ ♪ Each little bird that sings ♪ ♪ He made their glowing colors ♪ ♪ He made their tiny wings ♪ ♪ All things bright and beautiful ♪ ♪ All creatures great and small ♪ ♪ All things wise and wonderful ♪ ♪ The Lord God made them all ♪ ♪ The purple-headed mountain ♪ ♪ The river running by ♪ ♪ The sunset and the morning ♪ ♪ That brightens up the sky ♪ ♪ The cold wind in the winter ♪ ♪ The pleasant summer sun ♪ ♪ The ripe fruits in the garden ♪ ♪ He made them every one ♪ ♪ All things bright and beautiful ♪ ♪ All creatures great and small ♪ ♪ All things wise and wonderful ♪ ♪ The Lord God made them all ♪ ♪ He gave us eyes to see them ♪ ♪ And lips that we might tell ♪ ♪ How great is God almighty ♪ ♪ Who has made all things well ♪ ♪ All things bright and beautiful ♪ ♪ All creatures great and small ♪ ♪ All things wise and wonderful ♪ ♪ The Lord God made them all ♪ (church organ plays brightly)

- The gospel today comes from St. John, the 10th chapter, verses 1 through 10. "Very truly, I tell you, "anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate "but climbs in by another way "is a thief and a bandit. "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. "They will not follow a stranger, "but they will run from him "because they do not know the voice of strangers. " Jesus used this figure of speech with them, "but they did not understand what he was saying to them. "So, again, Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, "I am the gate for the sheep. "All who came before me "are thieves "and bandits. "But the sheep did not listen to them. "I am the gate. "Whoever enters by me "will be saved "and will come in and go out and find pasture. "The thief comes only to steal "and kill "and to destroy. "I came that they may have life "and have it abundantly." This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

- This is always a poignant time of year in the university. The pace is frenetic and there are not enough hours in the day to do all that needs to be done. But it is bearable because we know it will all be over soon. We may feel twinges of regret about the things that we wanted to do that we didn't get to, or the things that we might have done better. But there's also a wonderful sense of closure and satisfaction. For good or bad, the semester, and the academic year, are drawing to a close. This summer, we'll start planning for the next year and we'll get ready to do it all over again. But for now we look forward to the finish when we can let go of what is done and look ahead to new possibilities. These cycles of endings and beginnings are an enjoyable part of life at the university. But it also means that nearly one fourth of our students leave every spring. It is with sadness as well as hopefulness that we say goodbye to them. We will miss them, but we also know it's time to let them go. We hope we've had some positive influence upon them and we hope that they will apply the best of what they've learned at Duke University and the best of themselves to make a difference in the world. It is to these students, these graduating students, for whom we feel such pride and hope for the future that this sermon is dedicated. Please know that our prayers and thoughts go with you as you venture forward from Duke University to new possibilities and a future yet to be revealed. Most of us know what it's like to face a time when we must move forward from what is familiar to what is unknown. Again and again throughout life we make decisions about which path to follow as we seek to create a good life, a meaningful life, for ourselves. And there are pivotal moments when we make choices which have significant consequences for our future. The decision to go to medical school, the decision to get married, the decision to have children, the decision to make a career change, the decision to seek a divorce. Sometimes these decisions come easily to us, but other times they feel like a tremendous burden, and we fear making the wrong choice. We struggle with how to know which path is the right path, what choice among the many choices is the right one for us. Then there are the casual decisions that we make, which, over time, give expression to our values and shape the character of our lives. These are the common, everyday choices that we make, like what kind of relationships we have, how we spend our time, what kind of work we do, how we spend our money, what we think about most often, the ways we get involved in our community, how we treat other people, what we keep and what we give away, how we worship, and how we play. Daily, we are faced with choices about how we will live. And, taken together, those decisions that we make reflect who we are and the values we hold most dear. So how do we learn to discern what is right in those pivotal moments

and in the everyday, seemingly casual choices that we make? How do we make good decisions that will lead to the kind of life that we want to have? How do we know, each one of us, individually, what is the right way to go? Finding, or failing to find a satisfactory answer to this question is part of the human condition. It is the challenge of life that each one of us must face. How do we know what is the right way to go? The Gospel of John says that the shepherd of the sheep 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. This is a remarkable scripture. First, it asserts that we are sheep and that we have a shepherd. It may make us uncomfortable, we may be resistant to the idea, but the scripture says that someone else has ownership rights over us. Our lives are not just our own to do with as we please. The shepherd calls his own sheep. In this text, Jesus asserts that we belong to him. We are part of God's flock. The shepherd has a claim on us. And the shepherd calls us by name: each one, individually, called, named by God. What an awesome claim to make, that each one is called by the creator and author of life, the same God who created the vast universe, with more than 250 billion times 250 billion stars. The same God who created the amazing diversity of life, so that if we examine a handful of soil under an electron microscope, we discover that it teems with billions upon billions of microorganisms. The same God that brought all this into being, from the most gigantic galaxy to the most minute microbe, the same God who created creation to function flawlessly according to laws of a unity and order whose perfection we are only beginning to understand, this same God calls us by name, individually, one by one: Sandy, Elena, Jen, Atiba, Jason, Betsy, Eliza, Emily, Greg, Jonathan, Elizabeth, Chris. Each one of us is called, individually, by name, because each of us matters to God. Do you understand how amazing that is? That this isn't an overseer who is indifferent, this isn't an absent landlord, but a shepherd who knows us intimately and calls us by name. How do we know when our name is called by the shepherd? Many of us could describe experiences when we felt a presence, an awareness, a peace, a power that was intangible, yet nevertheless very real. Perhaps it was in a moment of prayer, perhaps it was reading a scripture that suddenly came alive, or a time of quiet reflection. Maybe it was a dream that has stayed with you or a song that reverberates in your heart. It could have been a moment of deep connection with a stranger, or an experience of being loved. It might have been a time of struggle when you endured more than you were able, or perhaps it was a moment of intense joy. There are so many ways that God reaches out to us, pursuing us, watching over us, calling us by name, inviting us into closer relationship. For God desires to be known by us even as we are known by God. In the scripture, Jesus says that we can know the shepherd. The sheep know the shepherd's voice. God wants to be known. God wants to be so familiar to us, so close to us, that we will have no difficulty discerning God's voice from all others. Think about the people you're closest to. Imagine the voices that you know so well that you recognize them in the dark. When you hear their voice, you don't need to ask "Who is it?" You know them immediately. And with that recognition comes all the feelings and the power of the relationship. When they speak to you, their words mean more than what they say in that given moment, because of all that has gone before, and all that you remember and know about them. And when they ask something of you, you aren't afraid to comply because you trust them inherently, and you know that they have your best interests at heart. The shepherd desires a relationship with us that is so close and so intimate that we immediately discern his voice from all others. The shepherd wants to be so well-known, so trusted, that the very sound of his voice comforts us, because we know who the shepherd is. The shepherd is like a mother whose voice reaches out through the darkness to calm her child in the midst of a storm. The shepherd is like a father who protects his children from harm. We trust this shepherd, because the shepherd lays down his life for the

sheep. He gives whatever is needed to lead them to abundant life and safe pasture. It is through the quality of the relationship and the experience of God's love and care that we begin to trust enough to follow wherever the shepherd leads. So how do we go about developing that quality of relationship with the shepherd? Well, we have to do what we do in any other close relationship. We have to spend time together. We have to be vulnerable, open, and honest, we have to be totally ourselves. We have to be willing to open our hearts. We have to have a genuine desire to know the shepherd. We have to be good listeners. We have to be willing to take the risk of trusting the shepherd, first with small things, and then as our faith and confidence grows, with our whole lives. The best place to develop this intimate relationship is in the sheepfold, for that is where the sheep get called out by name. It is a paradox that we get called together, one by one. The relationship with the shepherd is at the same time singular and plural. It is private and corporate. We hear our names spoken, each one, together. God desires to be in relationship with us individually, but also to make us part of the flock and to bring us into the sheepfold. For it is here, in the church, that we have a chance to be with others who know the shepherd. It is here that we tell the stories and remember the times and places when the shepherd's voice has been heard in the past. It is here that we learn to recognize the shepherd's character and the shepherd's ways. It is here that we share our own stories about how we've come to know the shepherd. And it is here that we are told the shepherd will come and call us by name and lead us out into right paths. We are never intended to face the future alone, or to have to discern what is right for us alone. The shepherd has made us part of the flock so that we might benefit from the wisdom of those who have followed the shepherd across the ages, and the support and guidance of those who continue to listen for the shepherd's distinctive voice. The shepherd has brought us into the sheepfold so that, together, we might find the way to save pasture and abundant life, nourishment for our deepest needs, protection from all that could harm us, clarity of discernment to recognize those who would lead us astray, strength for times of trouble, and courage to follow wherever the shepherd leads, knowing that in all things the shepherd's deepest desire is to lead us into abundant life. That trust, that inner knowledge is really the heart of faith, whether or not we truly believe that the shepherd and guardian of our souls leads us to life abundant. If we believe this, then we need not be afraid to be led into the future wherever it might take us, because we are confident that we won't face it alone, and that wherever the future may lead and whatever the future may hold for us, the shepherd goes ahead of us, preparing the way, turning even the most difficult circumstances into an abundant blessing. What a wonderful hope that this gives us. To know that wherever we go, whatever uncertainty or dangers we face, the shepherd goes before us to lead us through and to bring us home again to safe pasture. We also face the future together as the church. The shepherd calls us out individually, but leads us forward collectively as the flock. The shepherd calls us by name but sends us forward together to be the church in the world. We are meant to share one another's burdens and joys. Our lives are not simply our own. Together, we belong to the shepherd. And there is more at stake than what we want to do and be, for by the choices that we make, individually and collectively, we give expression to the shepherd's character. This is the one who loved the world so much that he was willing to lay down his life for the sheep. As the church, created through the death and resurrection of the shepherd, we are called to follow in the way of love and sacrifice. We are called to make choices that transparently reflect God's love for the world in Jesus Christ. We are called to embody, together, the vision and the hope of abundant life that Christ makes available to us. For it is by our life as the church that the world will discern the shepherd's care and leading. When we make choices about the future, we do so with the realization that our life is part of God's life in the world. Who we become and what we do



