

Order of Worship for May 11, 2025

Prelude

P: Alleluia! Jesus Christ is risen!

C: He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Opening Hymn: *"The King of Love, My Shepherd Is"* - Hymn #709

Confession and Forgiveness of Sins:

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen

P: God made us, we are His.

C: It is He who made us, and we are His. We are His people, the sheep of His pasture.

P: Yet, we have sinned against Him.

C: All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his or her own way.

P: But Jesus, our Good Shepherd, gave His life for us.

C: The Good Shepherd laid His life for His sheep.

He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

(silence for reflection on God's Word)

P: By the power and authority of our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

Psalm 23:

Prayer

P: God of all power, You called from death our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep. Send us as shepherds to rescue the lost, to heal the injured, and to feed one another with knowledge and understanding, through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

Hymn of Praise: *"Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Me"* - Hymn #711

Reading from the Book of Acts: Acts 20:17-35

R: Now from Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not

knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

R: O Lord , have mercy on us.

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle Lesson: Revelation 7:9-17

R: After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

R: O Lord, have mercy on us.

C: Thanks be to God.

Third Lesson: John 10:22-30

P: At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around Him and said to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name bear witness about Me, but you do not believe because you are not part of My flock. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are One.”

P: O Lord, have mercy on us.

C: **Thanks be to God**

Children’s Message:

Sermon Hymn: “*Christ the Word of God Incarnate*” - **Hymn #540**

Sermon: “*Safe in God’s Hands*” – **John 10:22-30**

“He’s got the whole world in His hands.” This anonymously written African American spiritual hymn has existed for many years in several versions. Since its first known publication in 1927, it has been covered by countless artists. With each successive stanza, we could very well keep going and list everything that He has in His hands. Of course, the “He” in “He’s got the whole world in His hands” is God Himself. For this hymn is a hymn of trust in God’s hand, even when the circumstances of this fallen world are set against God’s people.

Indeed, everything in all of creation is in God’s hands. Our very lives are in His hands, including our past, our present, and our future. From the beginning of creation to the end is in His hands. “He’s got the whole world in His hands.”

But oh, how we try to wrest control from God’s hands and put it into our own. We can sometimes get the illusion that things are in our control. An article from 2018 called “Illusion of Control: Why the World Is Full of Buttons That Don’t Work” makes this point well. It illustrates our desire to have everything in our own control. In some cities, there is an incredible number of crosswalk buttons that actually do not work, and there may be no real incentive to fix them. The article goes on to state that there are buttons around us that are essentially placebo buttons that give us the illusion of control. You know how that little “close elevator door” button usually does not seem to actually do anything immediately. The door seems to close on its own timing no matter what. But pressing it makes you feel like you are in control over this contraption made to take you up and down. So often we surround ourselves with things that give us the illusion that we are in control. But it often feels more like our hands are tied at the end of each day. Now add on top of this the things that we know that we have no control over, such as sickness, weather, wars, the economy, the happenings across the world, and it may make us want to throw our hands up in the air in despair. Maybe, just maybe, you start to wonder, “Does He have the whole world in His hands?” Because there are many times when our attempts at explanations just don’t work.

Those questioning Jesus thought they were in control. The religious leaders in Jerusalem thought they could control the people, control the Romans, control even God. They thought

everything was in their hands. And so, they want to know who Jesus is. They want to put a label on him. Once they did so, they would know how to deal with him, how to control him, how to keep him in their hands.

Yet Jesus knew things were not in their hands. He was not in their hands. Not yet, at least. He knew they were all in God's hands. He knew He was in God's hands. He would be given into their hands at the right time. He would be given into the hands of sinful men. But he would do so in order that no one and nothing would be able to take his sheep out of his father's hands.

Jesus is not afraid of their anger. He is not scared of their rejection. In fact, He is willing to bear their rejection because they cannot stop what He is doing. What Jesus is doing is not blasphemy. It is mercy. They think Jesus, being man, has made Himself God. In fact, it is the opposite. Jesus, being God, has taken on human flesh and become man. Not only has He taken on human flesh, but He has become human in order that He might suffer and die for the sins of the world.

Like a shepherd, He will lay down His life for His sheep. He will suffer and die under the punishment for sin and then rise from the dead and proclaim the triumph of His love. Though they kill Him, Jesus knows that His Father will raise Him from the dead and deliver His sheep into His hands. Nothing can separate sinners from God's love. With this proclamation of love, Jesus will gather His sheep. And, having gathered them, He will guard them as He leads them through this world.

One of the most popular, most well-loved images of Jesus is of him as our Good Shepherd. It's been that way almost since the very beginning. One of the earliest pieces of Christian art is of a shepherd, painted in the catacombs below Rome, where the earliest Christians buried their dead when things were very dark indeed for Christians. The military power of Rome had turned against Christians. They were killed in persecution, slaughtered in sport.

Somehow, however, as some things in Rome became darker for the Christians, other things became clearer. These early Christians, suffering persecution, began painting figures on the walls of their graves. Clear visions of God's mercy and power. In the darkness of the catacombs, they painted to show the light of salvation. In the tombs, where the early Christians buried their martyrs, who had been killed and cast off by the powers of the world. On the walls of these tombs, the early Christians painted their Savior, confessing the wonderful power of God. A power that saw and claimed the persecuted, the killed, the powerless, and the rejected. One figure, with a lamb across his shoulders, is the great Shepherd of the sheep. This is how the early Roman Christians retold the story of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, the one who had laid down his life for them and defeated death for them. This is how they told of how, despite death and darkness, the Good Shepherd kept them safe, and none of his flock would be snatched out of his hand.

Jesus' hand is still at work through His church today, baptizing and teaching. Jesus' hand is at work when young and old alike have the promises of Baptism poured out upon their heads. Jesus' hands are at work when His body and blood are delivered into our mouths to eat. Jesus'

hands are at work when He opens the Scriptures to us to teach us the words of God. Our whole lives are in His hands.

This is also Mother's Day weekend. The life of a mother is a tension between holding the child close for protection, and of pushing their child out into the world, to spread their wings and fly. As author Dorothy Canfield puts it, "A mother is not a person to lean on, but a person to make leaning unnecessary." Mothers protect their children, teach their children, but their goal is for their children to grow up and move out on their own.

On their own, but never alone. Even as children grow, graduate, and move away, mothering never really is done. Mothers are always there with a comforting word and wise advice. As humorist Erma Bombeck wrote, "When your mother asks, 'Do you want a piece of advice?' it is a mere formality. It doesn't matter if you answer yes or no. You're going to get it anyway." But we also trust that as children grow up and move away, that they are still in God's hands.

God has established his kingdom in Jesus Christ. Through the gospel, God has called you into that kingdom and, though this world and Satan himself should fight against it, that kingdom will never be taken away. As the end of the semester comes for ISU students and approaches for younger students, as life continues to be full of change, as pain still comes into our lives, remember that you are all sheep of the Good Shepherd who promises to forgive you for all the things that will go wrong, to sustain you and lead you in the ways that you should go. When you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, this Jesus is with you. Like that early Christian fresco of Jesus the Good Shepherd. Through him, you live. In him, you die. And, by him, you will be raised to eternal life.

This is the Good News of the Good Shepherd: You are in the hands of the Good Shepherd, and nothing can snatch you out of his hand. When you fear that you have wandered far from the fold, Jesus finds you and brings you back. And when you know that you have nothing, absolutely nothing, to offer God, he offers you himself. This has nothing to do with what kind of sheep we've been. It has everything to do with the love and mercy of the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd is with you and before you and in you—and for you. The Good Shepherd keeps His flock safe. He's got the whole world in His hands, even and especially you. That's a promise you can trust.

Second Article of Creed: p. 322

Prayers of the Church:

P: Lord, in Your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

Hymn: *"The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want"* - **Hymn #710**

Closing Prayer:

The Lord's Prayer:

Blessing:

P: Go now with your trust in the Good Shepherd, and let us love, not just in words, but in truth and action. Believe in the name of Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He has commanded us. God the Father be at your side, even in valleys of death. Christ Jesus be the cornerstone of your life. The Holy Spirit abide in you and tend you with love and mercy all the days of your life.

C: Amen.

Recognition of Graduates

Closing Hymn: *"I Am Jesus' Little Lamb"* - **Hymn #740**

Postlude: