

**April 21, 2024 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter**  
**Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope**

**Acts 4:5-10, Psalm 23, 1 John 3:16-24**  
**John 10:11-18**

[Lecture by Debra Rienstra at Calvin College about Refugia and her book Refugia Faith: Seeking Hidden Shelters, Ordinary Wonders, and the Healing of the Earth:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=ssp=eJzj4tVP1zc0LMwwtSqvLCszYPTiLUpNK03PTFRIS8wsyQAAkYsJ8A&q=refugia+faith&oq=Refugia+faith&ags=chrome.1.35i39i512i650j46i512i0i390i512i650j3i69i60i2.5679i0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:a7685670,vid:aXYAOhZ2UOU,st:0>

University Lutheran Church of Hope history, books from the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary are available in hard copy and also here online:

<https://www.ulch.org/history-of-university-lutheran-church-of-hope>. Reference to 12 year old Gigi is from the Ecofaith Summit held in Duluth, more information here: <https://nemnsynod.org/ecofaith-network/> and links to the talks will be in our Thursday Epistle on 4-25-24.

**Grace and peace to you, beloved creatures of our creator, our redeemer, our sustainer, our shepherd. Amen.**

**Our neighbor Ben is a lanky guy, perhaps in his 40s, I don't really know.**

Once, twice, sometimes three or more times a day he strides by our place,

grandpa-style fishing hat askew upon his head,

leash in hand, dog at his side.

Early morning walks,

short jaunts during a lunch break when he's working at home, out and about he goes.

For years he walked his faithful dog Pepper,

notably matching her pace as she became more and more frail.

Finally last spring, Pepper died.

On a Saturday morning we accompanied him to the dog park to scatter her ashes.

Ben was heartbroken, and we with him.

**Come the fall, Ben welcomed a tiny, springy puppy into his life,**

a sweet girl he named Mae,

overflowing with puppy spunk,

and very short young puppy legs.

For a season, when she was smallest, we'd look out the window through the day,

and see lanky Ben striding by, hat askew.

Instead of a leash in his hand, Ben carried little Mae in the crook of his arm.

This little puppy rode in Ben's arms as he walked the sidewalks of the neighborhood..

After a time they'd stop, and he'd put her down to explore in the grass and leaves,

then he'd lift her up,

and they'd walk home together, Mae in Ben's arms.

As spring rolls around once again, Mae has grown, now she's all legs.

Lanky Ben strides by, hat askew, and a very happy Mae is learning to walk on a leash at his side.

**Beloved, we call this Good Shepherd Sunday, always the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter.**

Always a snippet of reading from John's Gospel where Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd."  
Always Psalm 23—the Lord is my shepherd.

**That image of Ben, a shepherd of sorts, carrying little Mae has been with me all these months.**

And yet the more I think about it,

I also see Ben the shepherd as he accompanied his elder dog as she slowed down,  
as he wept over the loss of this sweet companion,  
as he trusted enough to welcome another,  
as he let this knew young pup work her way into his heart,  
teaching her when to play, how to rest, what to chew and what not to chew.  
carrying her when she needed to be carried,  
giving her the freedom to run hard and rest safely,  
loving her unconditionally, we call that grace.

**Good Shepherd Sunday.**

There is plenty to preach about sheep and shepherds, but this week three R, as in the letter R,  
are my focus: Routines, Refugia, and Renewal.

These are my three R's for Good Shepherd Sunday:

**First, Routines, as in daily routines, as in regularity (yikes, another R!), as in rhythm.**

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*

*The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters.*

Following the sun, the warmth of the day, the needs of the sheep,

a shepherd's life must be full of routine, not unlike raising children.

This year I'm finding new comfort in these passages, for their daily-ness, their routine.

The *green pastures* aren't an occasional splurge, but, it seems, a daily need,

this is lunch, but also breakfast and supper and all the rest.

The *still waters* where an anxious sheep can hydrate safely are essential for wellness, daily wellness.

I've often imagined the *table in the presence of my enemies* as some garden party fancy affair,

table cloth blowing in the wind.

But we hunger and eat more often than that,

and any 4<sup>th</sup> grader can tell us about playground drama, and spaces that just don't feel so safe.

*The Lord is my shepherd,*

*I wonder how God is your shepherd in the routines and rhythms each day, each season?*

**Another R word: Refugia. R-E-F-U-G-I-A.**

Refugia is a biology term that refers to a place where elements of biodiversity persist and return, even in a time of disturbance or crisis.

Think: a surprising little pocket of green growth in the midst of the ash after Mount St. Helen's erupted.

These places offer shelter, but also have the capacity for growth, so their edges are permeable.

Pastor Maria recently pointed me to the work of a Calvin College professor, Debra Rienstra.

Rienstra is writing about Refugia, both literally in the biological sense,

and also metaphorically as we think about community as a refuge during a time of climate crisis, or social upheaval.

In the midst of the climate crisis, Refugia could mean a community like this congregation, like Hope,

that is addressing climate on a number of different levels:

years back you worked on composting and recycling, creating rain gardens,

now we're physically harnessing solar, leaning on LED, reducing energy use, exploring options,

and we're educating ourselves,

we're advocating for change,

we're addressing the underlying spiritual crisis,

and we're seeking relationship with creation in new ways.

During today's Sunday Forum we heard a clip from a recent conference

where Duluth 12 year old Gigi was a respondent to the presenter.

Gigi named her rage, her resentment, her despair, her hope, her disappointment in the planet

she and her generation are inheriting.

And then she spoke of helping others (that's all of us) "see the urgency."

At our best, we find Refugia here at Hope: there's a sense of shelter, and also a launching, a growth.

Our Green Team has a new name and a refreshed mission.

Now it's called Hope With Creation and it is bringing together all these areas.

In the future, we'll learn more about this ideas of Refugia.

*For today, in the spirit of Good Shepherd Sunday and Earth Day,*

*I'm curious about how a community like ours can even more fully be a space of Refugia?*

*a space of shelter and also growth, seeing the urgency, embodying the hope, being the change,*

*as we seek new ways to live in relationship with creation at this critical moment?*

**And my final R word is Renewing.**

It was 120 years ago tomorrow, April 22, 1904, that this congregation began.

First in a home,  
later in a 2<sup>nd</sup> floor dance hall on 14<sup>th</sup> Ave. by the railroad tracks,  
in the spot where the restaurant Annie's Parlour now stands,  
and finally between 1908 and 1910 this space was built, here on 13<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Celebrating this 120 year milestones is important—join us for fellowship today!

**Yesterday in the morning we marked the passing** of a long time member Bernice Davenport,  
and in the afternoon a wonderful ordination for now-Pastor Emily Brown  
Thank you for showing up to honor Bernice's life and to support Garvin and their family.  
And thank you also for showing up to pray for and celebrate what God is doing through Pastor Emily,  
and through us... it's no small feat to raise up leaders. Thank you.

We have a lot in the mix right now, my friends:

Our leaders are working hard to coalesce plans for the generous donation.

We're honing in on specifics, and prioritizing, AND it can feel a bit messy at this stage,  
that's real, I hear you.

The Minneapolis Area Synod Assembly is coming up in less than two weeks, May 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup>,  
and with it the Bishop's election.

I know this is a time of anxiety, trust me, I'm feeling it too.

Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Renewal. Death and life.

What can feel like stuck spots, anxieties, and uncertainty.... can lead to growth and clarity and opportunity.

*Dear ones, what renewal are you seeking? Can that be our prayer today?*

**Routines and Rhythms. Refugia. Renewal. Some R words for this day.**

**I don't actually know how many weeks my neighbor Ben**

carried his sweet and snuggly Mae on their walks.

I'd imagine it was a month or more, but it doesn't really matter.

For what matters, to me at least, is this image seared into my mind's eye:

Of a lanky guy, with his hat askew, faithfully caring for his beloved.

It is a reminder that our Good Shepherd, loves us and this broken and beautiful world,

and our Good Shepherd meets us right where we are,

with what we need, in every season,

and takes us where we need to go, always and forever. Thanks be to God. Amen.