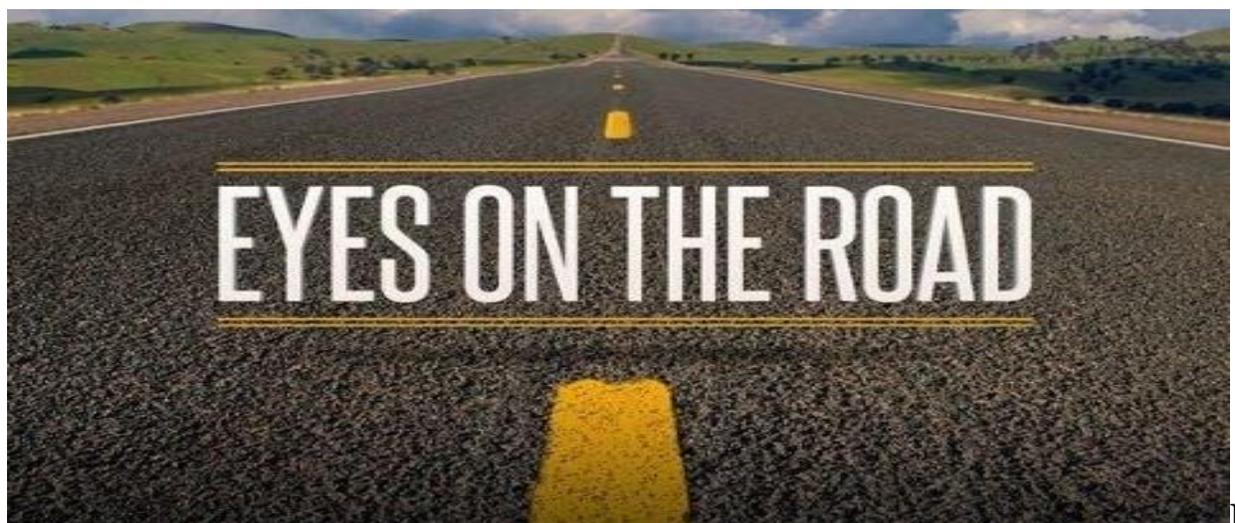




SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER  
ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH  
CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

**FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**

**May 7, 2017**



**Introduction to the Word:**

The Easter Season is a 50 Day Period Where Jesus Shows Himself to His Disciples. He often does this "on the road". So for several weeks we are going to look at how Jesus show Himself and ask if we His followers today show Him the same way by keeping our **Eyes on the Road**.

The Resurrection appearance stories are filled with examples of how the disciples did not recognize Jesus, they took their eyes off the road (the way) and focused instead on doubt and whisper. They thought he was a gardener, a ghost, or a stranger. As we walk on the way we must keep our "eyes on the road."

Last week we learned that takes *focus, firmness and faithfulness*. This week we continue our walk and our series of messages to help us see the distractions and learn tools we need. [Check out the message from last week](#) and bring a friend this Lord's Day to Mass

**Warm Up Activity:**

The Gospel of John today will introduce us to the Good Shepherd who gave His life for us. This is one of the very rich images of Jesus we find in the Gospel of John, one of many images found in the Gospel. What are some of your favourite images of who Jesus is for you, and why? They may be images from John's Gospel, or other parts of scripture, or may not be found in the scriptures at all.

**CALL TO PRAYER (5 MINUTES)**



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The Good Shepherd knows us and calls us by name, inviting us to enter the sheep gate in order to be nourished and protected.

**Lord Jesus**, you call us to follow you, our Good Shepherd,  
**Christ Jesus**, you gently and lovingly hold us in your arms,  
**Lord Jesus**, you feed us with the gift of forgiveness,

**Lord, have mercy.**  
**Christ, have mercy**  
**Lord, have mercy.**

**Let us pray together our Heart to Home Prayer:**

*God Our Heavenly Father, we long to make our thoughts your thoughts,  
and our ways your ways. As we prepare with attentive mind and open heart  
to hear your Word Lord, we long to be empowered with your Spirit  
so that we may bring your Word to our families, our parish and our communities.  
This, our prayer, we make through the intercession of Our Lady of the Visitation and in name of  
Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

**SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME** (45 minutes)

(Please select one person –not including the leader – to take a turn at reading the scripture passages below.)

**FIRST READING** (Acts 2:14a, 36b-41)

When the day of Pentecost had come, Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd. “Let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Now when the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other Apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.”

And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day were added about three thousand souls.

**The Word of the Lord.** Thanks be to God.

**SECOND READING** (1 Peter 2:20b-25)

Beloved: 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



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he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.

Christ 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.

**The Word of the Lord.** Thanks be to God.

### **GOSPEL** (John 10:1-10)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Jesus said: "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 of 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 destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

**The Gospel of the Lord.** Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

*(Allow a few minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection on a meaningful word or thought)*

### **COMMENTARY:**

Acts brings us to the day of Pentecost in order to hear the second part of Peter's Pentecost discourse. Peter has already presented the discourse concerning who Jesus was (the humanity of Jesus) and what happened to Him. Now Peter focuses upon Jesus the Messiah who is "both Lord and Christ", the Son of God (the divinity of Jesus). The crowd clearly accepts the validity of Peter's statement as we see when they ask "Brothers, what should we do?" Peter gives the same four-point answer the Church has given through the ages to those who desire to follow Jesus. "Repent, and be baptized"; do this in "the name of Jesus" (in order to distinguish it from the baptism of John the Baptist); for this "your sins may be forgiven"; and the reward will be "the gift of the Holy Spirit". This preaching by Peter today was clearly intended as a challenge to his listeners to change their lives. This call to change "involved a radical openness to a re-evaluation of the identity of the person of Jesus and his significance for them" Three thousand people responded to Peter's challenge.



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Now in the Gospel of John we move to an image of the kind and gentle Good Shepherd, who calls us by name, who invites us to follow while He watches and protects us. This Good Shepherd promises to lead us through the sheep gate as a means to eternal life. This is anything but a lament! This is joyful news! Jesus is offering His followers assurance that He will be present in their lives. For just as a shepherd is doing his job properly when he watches, protects and feeds his sheep, so too will Jesus be doing the same for us. So while Jesus is using symbolic and metaphoric images as He speaks of the Good Shepherd, making it perhaps difficult to fully understand the meaning of all that He is saying, we still follow Him because we recognize His voice, while we avoid following the misleading voice of a stranger. How nicely John's image of the Good Shepherd ties in with the Psalm for today, Psalm 23.

Today's Psalm reflects upon the Lord as our Shepherd. God is portrayed as a faithful and good Shepherd who leads the flock to green pastures (well-being and abundance). God keeps us safe from dangers (valley of darkness). Therefore, we want for nothing and fear no evil, even while surrounded by foes (wolves and lions). And so we listen for the Good Shepherd calling us by name, and we follow when called.

This Sunday marks the 54<sup>th</sup> annual World Day of Prayer for Vocations. The church is invited on this day to offer prayers specifically for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and religious life, as well as prayers in support of those who have responded to the call to priesthood and/or religious life. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has given this day the theme of **“Led by the Spirit for Mission”**. Pope Francis has also offered a formal message for the church on this day. Here is some of what Pope Francis has to say:

Pope Francis points out that those who find themselves drawn to God with a desire to follow Jesus “discover within themselves an irrepressible desire to bring the Good News to their brothers and sisters through proclamation and the service of charity ... We are simply men and women touched and transformed by the joy of God's love, who cannot keep this experience just to ourselves.” Pope Francis reminds us that this kind of Christian life, priesthood and religious life is “an essential element of faith itself.” The Pope also reminds those who are already priests and religious that they are “called to go forth from the sacred precincts of the temple and to let God's tender love overflow for the sake of humanity.” The Pope concludes his message by addressing the People of God with a request. **“I ask parish communities, associations and the many prayer groups present in the Church, not to yield to discouragement but to continue praying that the Lord will send workers to his harvest.”** (Pope Francis. *Led by the Spirit for Mission*. Issued November 27, 2016, Rome).

Through our baptism we have been called to mission, to proclaim our faith by what we say or do in our lives. The reading from First Peter reminded us that there is a code of conduct we are called to follow as we live the Christian life, as we participate in mission. Acts called for a conversion in one's life in order to follow Christ, as we participate in mission. The Good Shepherd reminds us that following Him can lead us to the gift of eternal life, as we participate



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in mission. Pope Francis, on this World Day of Prayer for Vocations, invites us to discover the “irrepressible desire to bring the Good News,” to be led by the Spirit to mission.

Let us, as a parish community, rejoice in the two young men from our midst who are discerning a call to priesthood and who will soon begin their internship programs (an important final stage of their preparation). Let us also recall those in our midst considering priesthood and religious life as a way of life in service to God’s people. Let us also not forget the priests and religious who serve us.

One way to keep our eyes on the road, is to be aware prayerfully that Jesus is always offering His followers assurance that He will be present in their lives. He often does through the symbol of those around us who seek to be good shepherds leading us toward well-being and abundance and safe from dangers (valley of darkness) ....let’s pray for them...and ask God to give them the strength they need to guide God’s people on the way.

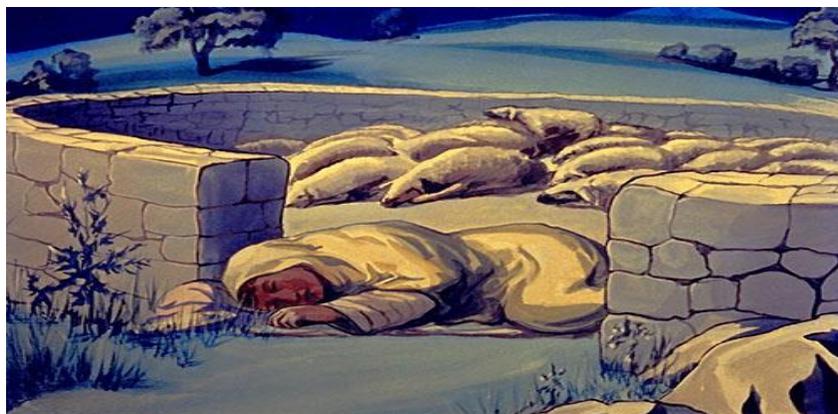
*(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or idea.)*

**Before moving to your group questions - consider [listening to this song](#) by Steven Curtis Chapman called “The One”. He is the person we are called to keep our eye on while we travel this road – He is the Good Shepherd.**

**Questions for Reflection and Discussion:** *(15-20 minutes)*



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Jesus identifies Himself as a Shepherd but also a 'gate'. In the middle east, shepherds would gather their sheep together at night sometimes creating a shelter or collection of wooden sticks to build a fence. Sometimes they may have built with blocks a square with a narrow gap for the sheep to enter in and out. One shepherd would take the role of 'gate', lying down in the 'gap' as an expression of caring for the sheep and not letting them out, and protecting the sheep from danger coming in. What does this image reveal to you about Jesus?

In the Church and on behalf of the Church, priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ – the head and shepherd – authoritatively proclaiming his word, repeating his acts of forgiveness and his offer of salvation – particularly in baptism, penance and the Eucharist, showing his loving concern to the point of a total gift of self for the flock, which they gather into unity and lead to the Father through Christ and in the Spirit. In a word, priests exist and act in order to proclaim the Gospel to the world and to build up the Church in the name and person of Christ the head and shepherd (*Pastores Dabo Vobis, no 15*). What does this statement teach you about the role of the Priest? Have you ever been 'thankful' for the gift and ministry of a priest?

Today we can have an image of sheep being 'driven' by a shepherd on a horse using dogs to control the sheep in large nameless mobs or herds, but that is not an image of how the Holy Spirit works with us. A Christian disciple is never 'driven' but is 'drawn' to look upon the love of Christ on the cross, and then, in co-operation with grace, is drawn to 'be' Christ on the cross with arms outstretched in love of the world. Those called to the 'consecrated life' seek to conform their whole existence to Christ (*Vita Consecrata 16*). How can small groups help draw others persons so you can grow in the ability to listen deeply to the voice of the Good Shepherd? How can your group do that?

### Intercessions:

**Leader:** Our response: Lord Hear us



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- For Pope Francis: may God strengthen him in his apostolic ministry as the successor of Peter and the shepherd of Christ's faithful people here on earth. We pray to the Lord.
- For the young people of the parish who received the Sacrament of Confirmation this past Lord's Day weekend; may the Holy Spirit be a familiar friend in their lives. We pray to the Lord.
- For the children of the parish who are receiving their First Holy Communion: may their childlike trust remind us to open our hearts to the Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. We pray to the Lord.
- For parents who are preparing for the baptism of their child: may they be the best teachers of their child in the ways of faith by the good example that they offer. We pray to the Lord.
- For those from our parish community considering a Vocation to priesthood and religious life. For our two seminarians Hayden and Robin. May they experience the love of the Risen Lord as they seek to discern His will for their lives. We pray to the Lord.
- For areas of the world in need, especially in Kenya and in Haiti. May our prayers and support aide them and bring them closer to Christ. We pray to the Lord.
- For all who have died, as well as for all the intentions recorded in the parish book of prayer. We pray to the Lord.

Leader: **Let us seek the intercession of the Patroness of our Parish as we pray:**  
**Hail Mary**

### **Closing Activity and Prayer** (15-20 minutes)

*(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. You may wish to create and add petitions of prayer at this time. This time also intent to provide moments to connect and "outreach" to the larger community.)*

### **GROUP PRAYER/ ACTION:**

- Prayerfully consider whom you know that is doubting and would being a part of a Small Group help them (or even part of Starting Point) – have you considered inviting them?
- Prayerfully discuss as a Group your involvement in our May 27<sup>th</sup> Service Saturday...how will your group help? Check our website for the opportunities – something for everyone!
- Prayerfully talk about who you will invite to join you on Mother's Day at Mass – and if you are a mom – invite your entire family to be with you at Church on Sunday.
- Spend time as a group in Eucharistic Adoration – prayer for our shepherds in the Church

### **VBS/Camp Brebeuf/Steubenville 2017**

Our parish is blessed with an outstanding Children's Ministry which attracts over 100 children each Lord's Day at our 9:30am and 11:30am Masses and each year welcome almost 50 to be part of VBS (July 10-14). We also have a great Youth Ministry program – Kids Klub (Grade 5-8) and Da Crew (Grade 9-12). A highlight event each summer for our Kids Klub is "Adventure Day at



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Camp Brebeuf” on July 6<sup>th</sup> and for our high-schoolers the Steubenville Conference from July 28-20.

Is there a way that you could help Shepherd some of our young people in these events as a small group? :

- Could you be a prayer partner for our teens?
- Could you consider as a group sponsoring a child(ren) (\$35 for VBS, \$25 for Adventure Day, \$200 for Steubenville or even all three for \$260)?
- Could you consider inviting a teen to be part of our Youth Ministry or pass on the word about our amazing Children’s Ministry

**Let us pray** (together)

Lord Jesus, we thank for the word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice that which your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, your mother, not only listen to but also practice the Word. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever.

Amen

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