

HOMILY

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

May 3, 2009

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Davison, Michigan

I invite you to go back with me in time some two thousand years:

- ✠ Watch as a gentle man takes children in his arms and makes them feel important.
- ✠ Watch him as he reaches out to the sick and brings them healing and wholeness.
- ✠ Listen to him teach about forgiveness and grace and loving your enemies. And hear him say, *“I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly.”*

Today we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday. Our Shepherd brings us abundant life. How does he do it? He does it by helping us cope with those things that bring death to the human spirit. He helps us cope with our fears. Does anyone in this room know what it is to live a fearful life? How many of us are missing out on the joy of living simply because we live in a prison of anxiety?

Recently, there was a story from St. Louis about Karen Hickey, a 22-year-old secretary who had often wondered how it felt to be handcuffed. She found out the hard way. She tried on some old handcuffs that her boss had brought to the office. Unfortunately, she forgot to ask if the boss had the key to the cuffs. She remained handcuffed for two hours until fireman, working with electric cutters, freed her.

There are people who live their entire lives in handcuffs, as it were, because of fear. And they never realize that Christ has the key.

A little fear is healthy, of course. Fear is a necessary part of our lives. But unnecessary fear can be inconvenient. People who are afraid to fly have no choice but to drive or ride a bus for hours or simply stay home. Such fears are

inconvenient. Others are downright painful. There are those who shrink away from life in general. They avoid new experiences; they're afraid of making decisions.

If I'm talking to you today, Jesus wants to help you break out of that prison of fear. He wants to help you get rid of those handcuffs of anxiety. He wants to help you live your life to the fullest.

Christ helps us cope with our fears. All in all, he helps us get our lives into perspective.

That is the reason why many of us do not have an abundant life. We are running after the wrong things. We think an abundant life is having lots of stuff. But "stuff" can never bring us happiness. I sense that a change is taking place in our own society. The decade of greed is coming to a close. People are hungry for values, for relationships, for contact with God. They are hungry for those things that really matter.

A rich man named Carl loved to ride his horse through his vast estate to congratulate himself on his wealth. One day on such a ride, he came upon Hans, an old tenant farmer who had sat down to eat his lunch in the shade of a great oak tree. Hans' head was bowed in prayer. When Hans looked up, he said, "Oh excuse me, sir, I didn't see you. I was giving thanks for my food."

"Humph!" snorted Carl, the rich man. He noticed the coarse dark bread and cheese which made up the old man's lunch. "If that was all I had to eat, I don't think I would feel like giving thanks."

"Oh," replied Hans. "It is quite sufficient. But it is remarkable that you should come by today. I feel I should tell you. I had a strange dream just before awakening this morning."

"And what did you dream?" Carl asked with an amused smile.

The old man answered, "There was beauty and peace all around and yet I could hear a voice saying, 'The richest man in the valley will die tonight.'"

"Dreams!" cried Carl. "Nonsense!" He turned and galloped away.

“Die tonight,” thought Carl. “It was ridiculous. The best thing to do about the old man’s dream was to forget it.”

But he couldn’t forget it. He had felt fine, at least until Hans had described his stupid dream. Now he didn’t feel too well. That evening he called his doctor and asked him to come over. When the doctor arrived, Carl told him the old man’s dream of how the richest man in the valley would die that night. For peace of mind, the doctor examined Carl.

“Carl,” said the doctor, “You’re as strong and healthy as that horse of yours. There’s no way you are going to die tonight.”

Carl thanked his doctor and told him how foolish he felt to be upset by an old man’s dream.

It was about 9 a.m. when a messenger arrived at Carl’s door.

“It’s old Hans,” the messenger said. “He died last night in his sleep.”

Do you know what it is to be truly rich? If not, I want to introduce you to Jesus, our Good Shepherd. He will help you cope with your fears. He can help center your life on those things that really matter. Listen to him calling you by name.

