

[Music] Chances are you could recite verbatim the summer spiel you hear from me on a warm day.

Right?

Just in case.

There are points in the service where we often stand that's optional on a warm day.

And I guess any day if standing presents a challenge.

Hopefully you have water nearby.

And thank you to those who have made sure windows are open and fans are operating.

I think that will help us as we worship today.

We also want to call attention to a number of prayer concerns.

We've been asked to add the name of Beth, also Ralph from Port Colborne.

And you may have heard from the Synod this week.

We got an announcement on Friday about some very jarring and profoundly sad news for the people of St. Mark's, Lutheran and Anglican Church in Midland.

Their pastor, Pastor Martin Giebel, has died.

One can imagine the trauma that a congregation like St.

Mark's is going through today.

One can imagine the pain that Pastor Martin carried with him.

He and I have not really met.

We've been on Zoom calls together.

But as tributes are coming in from Facebook, he is remembered as the one who was there for other people in their time of need.

That he was a true shepherd and a good human being.

And I hope that his legacy as such will be the thing that truly defines his memory.

Today we will be talking about shepherding and I think it's appropriate for us to mention our Synod Bishop, Michael Pryse, who will be working with St.

Mark's, with Martin's family and with many.

My question is, who shepherds Bishop Michael?

Who takes care of Bishop-elect Carla when they have to enter into trauma like this to intervene and to provide care?

Finally, as we talk about shepherding today, you may hear this later, but just in case I forget or something, that shepherding, as the Bible imagine it, comes from a variety of sources.

Some of them religious, some of them civic, but all having to do with the common good.

And so I imagine the pastor, as the pastors want to do, will offer a call for the church to remember its role too, in shepherding a world that really needs some shepherding just now.

[music] [music] The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark.

The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.

Jesus said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile."

For many were coming and going and they had no leisure even to eat.

And the apostles went away in a boat to the deserted place by themselves.

Now, many people saw them going and recognized them and they hurried their on foot from all the towns and they arrived ahead of them.

As Jesus went ashore, he saw a great crowd and he had compassion for them because they were like a sheep without a shepherd.

And Jesus began to teach them many things.

When the apostles had crossed over with Jesus, they came to a land at Gennesaret and moored the boat.

When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized Jesus and they rushed about the whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was.

And wherever Jesus went, into villages or cities or farms, people laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak.

And all who touched it were healed.

The gospel of our Lord.

Grace and peace to you.

It is no exaggeration to say that Jesus was literally moved to his guts with compassion for desperate people.

I remember doing the word study in Greek and I could never quite pronounce it and always prayed that Dr.

Andrews wouldn't call upon me to say the word.

So I hope you'll just take my word for it, that the word here is that Jesus is moved to the viscera.

That is his response to a people in need of a shepherd.

Now it's not really that there were no people claiming to be shepherds or pretending to be shepherds or even appointed by Rome to be shepherds.

Bear in mind, shepherds were people who were called to oversee the common good.

And there were plenty of messiahs out there too who would say that they were the one God's chosen.

And they were pretty good at tapping into people's desperation, their fear, their hurt.

Who has their back?

Really.

You might have seen pictures this week of children in front of the hospital in Kiev that had been bombed out raising their hands toward what used to be a source of help for them, but now is just a wreck.

The New York Times had a picture this morning of children walking across a desert area in Sudan for water in a place so torn by war that the very act of going for water might get those kids killed.

Who's got their back?

What about kids and families of all sorts in Flint, Michigan, who for years have known that their water supply was tainted with lead?

Where are the shepherds?

What about people who are mopping up after horrendous storms that are caused by superheated oceans?

Or people withering from dehydration because of, again, record high temperatures for the second year in a row?

I imagine some are wishing that there would be a shepherd who would say a thing or two, or at least give a thought or two to the warning from the UN General Secretary, who said, "We have about a year and a half to either respond or not to climate hell," as he calls it.

Earlier this week, I had a chance to read a profile of two seniors in Canada who are struggling to make rent.

I can't help but wonder who has their backs.

I think in a way, the journalist, Natalie Stechersen, has their back because she at least brought it to public awareness.

I'd like to tell you a couple of stories that she shares.

Shoshana McGill.

She lives in the Kitchener Waterloo area.

She works as an assistant buyer for a local university.

She lives in a basement apartment. 80% of all that she earns and gets from pension goes to pay her rent.

This, I think, probably delightful individual based on what she said.

As a Mennonite growing up, she learned to pinch a penny 11 different directions.

And so she grows a lot of her own garden produce.

But she also knows that her job is soon to be automated.

Without her job, she has no place to live.

Who has Shoshana's back?

Then there's the retired business and communication consultant, Ron Sept.

He's 70 years old.

He lives in Nanaimo, B.C.

After he pays rent, he has \$100 left over for the rest of the month.

Ron relies on anti-depressant medication that he can't afford to buy so he doesn't.

Once in a while, families send money from overseas to try to help him stay afloat.

But here's what he said to the reporter, and here are the words that she shared on her CBC article.

Mr.

Sept said, "I am breaking my back to stay alive."

For what?

Who has his back?

Mr.

Sept and Ms.

McGill are not outliers.

Did you know that about 40% of us seniors rent?

And that rent evictions keep going up and the cost of rent keeps going up?

Some of us, we wonder, who has our back if anybody?

Have you been following politics at all in Canada or in that charming little bird down south?

I'm a bit of a history geek, so I'm doing that, but I'm also drawing on history that goes back several generations.

There have been and continue to be wannabe shepherds and self-proclaimed messiahs who are more than happy to draw upon our angst and raise up our suspicions and encourage us to blame whoever the other is that day.

I'm debating about telling you a story.

I think I'll tell it.

I was sharing this earlier this week.

I was in the second grade at Roosevelt School in Miles City, Montana, where I don't think communism was a particular threat.

But there was a sixth grader who was watching just enough TV to be afraid and suspicious, and so he would come up to us, littles, and he would grab us, and he would put his face in ours and say, "Are you a communist?"

I didn't even know what a communist was.

All I knew was you weren't supposed to be one because that would get you at least a thump upside the head from, I still remember the kid's name, but I won't say it, wonder what ever happened to him.

Maybe he outgrew his fear and his suspicion.

One can only hope so.

But the fact of the matter is that we are desperate for shepherding, the good kind.

If I were to tell you that today's gospel is all about you being a little nicer this week, that would be, I think, egregious malpractice, because remember who it is

that Jesus is with, the apostles, the ones who are sent.

That this word is a word for individuals only so far.

The word is really for a community of faith, the ones we call apostles, the ones we call the church.

These words are for the whole church.

We spoke of the shepherding that comes from our Synod Bishop and the Bishop-elect and many leaders, the ones who are ordained, the ones who are deacons, the ones who are members of congregations, who are shepherds.

I think Rona shared with us by email some things that happened at convention that I was blissfully unaware of, but now can't be able to unsee or unhear.

Homophobic slurs were thrown against some of the candidates for bishop.

It turned out later that one clergy went home to have a family celebration and because of gender and sexual identity had their house attacked.

Our shepherds are telling us, "Church, this does not stand.

We will condemn those acts and continue to stand up for what Jesus stands up for.

Love for everyone, shepherding people, especially people in need."

Maybe it is the church's job to remember the words of the late Desmond Tutu, the Archbishop of the Diocese of South Africa.

He said, "You know, the time has come where just pulling people out of the river won't be enough.

We are going to have to wander upstream and find out why they're falling in in the first place."

And your grumpy and grumpy pastor is going to say that some of those people were pushed.

So, if we are Jesus' followers, called into the same ministry that he was about, this shepherding, we need to consider just what it is that we're here for, just what is it that we are doing as church.

Do you remember the cute little bracelets from a couple of decades ago?

W.W.J.D.

I think I wore one for a while.

It's probably in a junk drawer somewhere.

That's not a bad question.

What would Jesus do?

But I think the question for the church, there are more letters that would fit gracefully on a bracelet.

In fact, there are enough letters to where when I worked out the acronym, I decided I can't do it from memory.

So, here it goes.

W.W.J.H.T.C.D.

W.W.J.H.T.C.D.

What would Jesus have the church do?

What would Jesus have the church do?

Amen.

[Music] [Music] [Music] (gentle music) [MUSIC]