



Reflections for the 4th Sunday of Easter

Good morning Church and Facebook friends. This is the day that Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Today is the 4th Sunday of Easter and while we cannot celebrate the Lord's supper together in person we can still break bread together and celebrate the cup of God's love virtually. God's table is open for everyone. This is where we can receive God's grace and forgiveness. All you have to do is to be willing to accept it.

I am Lisa Williams, the pastor at San Pedro United Methodist Church and this morning I am coming to you from a different space "the great outdoors." While I share what's coming up this week around the church, if you like take this time to gather your communion elements like some bread, muffin, cracker whatever you have on hand and a cup of juice, water or tea so you will be prepared for communion at the end of our service.

Five years ago the Garden Church, sprouted and opened its doors. This afternoon, the founding pastor Rev. Anna Woofenden will preach on a zoom call at 3:00 p.m. If you want to join in, let me know and I'll connect you to the number. Anna has written a book called "This is God's Table...finding church beyond the walls." This book has just been released and it is filled with stories of how the Garden Church started. On Monday at 7:00 p.m. there will be a virtually book signing and panel discussion with Rev. Amanda, Rev. Jonathan – current co-pastors of the Garden Church, Rev. Anna, the founder and myself, community partner. This will be on Live on the Garden Churches Facebook page.

Thursday at 10:00 a.m. I will be presenting during a Faith Convening sponsored by LAHSA – Los Angeles Housing Service Authority and other organizations on what is being done and how churches can help during the pandemic.

Saturday, May 9 our church will be providing 50 meals for our un-housed. Thank you for your donations for food. Yesterday during my delivery, I had received a donation of masks and we included hand sanitizer in our pill bottles. People were thrilled. Keep collecting you pill bottles they seem to be working well for sanitizer.

We continue to lift each other up in prayer. As people in our congregation and community experience moments of joy and times of shear sadness. Many of you have lost a parent during this pandemic. We are deeply sorry for your loss. Some of you have a child who has been or still is in the hospital and for that we send you our love. For all of life's emotions we ask God for patience with ourselves, patience for our loved ones, and patience for our elected officials as they continue to lead us forward. It is important to check in with yourself, make sure you are allowing space for all of emotions. And it is important to reach out, talk to a friend, call

your pastor, a neighbor or loved one if you are having feelings of anxiousness or if you are experiencing other negative symptoms or thoughts that might be lasting more than a day or so. We are a community brought together through God's grace and love and we are here to support and love each other.

Please pray with me: Open wide the window of our spirits, O God and fill us full of light; open the gate of our hearts, that we may receive and entertain the divine with all our power of adoration and love. Amen.

I invite you to think about an image of a gate. What does it look like, what color is? Is it plain or ornate? Is it wood or rod iron? Does it squeak when opened or does it open quietly and glide easily? Where have you encountered your gate? Is yours a picture from childhood or perhaps you have seen it in a photograph. It doesn't matter where your gate comes from as long as it is special to you.

The gate I am imagining is the one on 6th street between Mesa and Pacific. The color is green and the material is rod iron. I think of it as being just a tad ornate. Enough to give it character but not too much. It has some textural design which I find so interesting and it is the home of the legendary green Dino. The gate that I am referring to is the Garden Church.

Our scripture for today comes for John 10:1-10 - Jesus the Good Shepherd. As I read the scripture think about your image of the gate that holds meaning for you. Who God has placed in your life to be your shepherd here on earth? There are seasons of our lives when special "shepherds enter our lives through a gate. These person/persons may come and go, they might have been around only for a short while or maybe they have always been with us. Either way, one thing is clear, this person probably helped to shape who you are right now.

Let's hear the scripture.

John 10:1-10 - Jesus the Good Shepherd

10 "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. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech with, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷ So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate. Whoever

enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Earlier I shared with you an image of a gate that is important to me and now I would like to share with you the person that I associate with that gate. Her name is Rev. Anna Woofenden. She is the founder of the Garden Church. She has just written and published a book called “This is God’s Table...finding church beyond the church walls.” It is her story about her desire to start a church with no walls and creating a space where all could be feed both in spirit and in body. Her hope was to create an atmosphere where all could feel welcome no matter what your religious beliefs might be. To quote the current co-pastor Rev. Amanda’s six year old son at the time, who said when he first entered the gate, “Mama! There’s no roof! It’s a church with no roof! It is so special; I don’t know any other churches that don’t have roofs!”ⁱ

He’s right it is so special and there is no roof!

Anna recalls how I first noticed the Garden Church. It was on a First Thursday art night soon after being appointed as your pastor. We had met for tea a few weeks later. In her book she reminded me of my first thoughts, “Wow, they had an idea that I should have had – I could do that.” We quickly became friends and began exploring together what it meant to be pastors to all in this part of our town.

Sometimes we need another person to tell us what to wear, where to show up and how to act. If you have spent time cultivating a relationship with others like Jesus was encouraging his disciples to do you follow that trusted voice. That is what I did. Anna taught me the importance of wearing a collar when going out in the community, since she was a few months ahead of me in learning the community she was open in giving guidance on who and what organizations one should get to know. And she empowered me to believe in my gifts and competencies to minister well to my new community.

Anna graciously writes, “Pastor Lisa from the Methodist church right down the street gets what it means to minister to the community she too considers everyone in the community her congregation.”ⁱⁱ Anna provided me with a new platform for observing Ash Wednesday. Over breakfast at the Omelet and Waffle Shop we talked about what it would be like to walk the streets in our neighborhood and offer ashes. Go to the people instead of making them come to us. Seemed liked the right thing to do. So we tried it. Many of you know, for me this is one of my favorite days of worship. Is it because it was the first event Anna and I collaborated on? While meaningful, that is not the reason. The reason why this day of worship is so powerful is because it seems to be the one day of the year that we give ourselves permission to walk up to someone, look them in the eye, there is no time for judgment, all we are doing is reminding them that from dust they came and dust they shall return as we impose ashes in their forehead and tell them they are a beloved child of God. For me, this day levels the playing field. It serves as a

reminder for all to observe that no matter where we are in life, living in a mansion, or on the streets we are all worthy of God's love.

Anna also had a vision that one day Feed and be Fed, a branch of the Garden Church that holds its own 5013c could be used to help educate and support this community. I am proud of the work that has gone into developing the Harbor Neighborhood Relief Fund. The purpose of this fund is to help our neighbors today and in the future as life continues to evolve. You can go to the Feed and Be Fed website and click on the Harbor Neighborhood Relief Fund to donate. A seed was planted and now it is growing.

Thank you Anna for opening the gate to me and giving me tools to meet people where they are, I appreciate how you believed in me and helped me to believe in myself while giving me the encouragement to keep moving forward even after you were gone.

Verse 9 says, "I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. I believe most of us have gatekeepers throughout our lives that help us find our way or help guide us on a new path. For me, Anna played that role as gatekeeper in the early years of my ministry in San Pedro.

The Garden Church did and still does teach me that walls do not define a church. We are currently experiencing that right now. We are able to still worship, love and care for each other even without walls. If we listen God just might be helping us to imagine what a "new church" could look like. There is a song they sing at the garden and it says, "Remember there is enough, and some to share, and that yes, everyone has something they are hungry for, but also, everyone has something to offer."ⁱⁱⁱ

This morning's scripture reminds us that Jesus came so that we may have life and have it abundantly. Sometimes we have to be willing to open and walk through the gate so that others can help us. And then there are times we are the one standing at the gate encouraging people to come in. Both are important, both are necessary and both honor God.

As we get ready to celebrate the Lord's supper, I will leave you with Anna's last thoughts about what the Garden Church taught her: "God is making church all over the place, beyond the walls, on the streets, in the soil, and around the table. Whenever we gather (whether in person or via the internet) God is with us."^{iv} Amen.

Communion

Now let us collectively gather our prayers for each other as we celebrate communion.

Lift up your hearts and give thanks to the Lord our God.

Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, you made us in your image, to love and to be loved. When you turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast. By suffering,

death, and resurrection of our only Son Jesus Christ you delivered us from slavery to sin and death and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

On the night in which he gave himself up for us he took the bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Drink from this, all of you; for this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and the blood of Christ that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever. **Amen.**

And now, with the confidence of children of God, let us pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen

Now take your bread hold it in your hand, this is the body of Christ given for you. And this a cup of God's love given for you. **Amen**

Benediction

Now may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. Today, tomorrow and always. Amen.

ⁱ Anna Woofenden, “This is God’s Table...finding church beyond the church walls” (Virgina, Harold Press, 2020)
p 236

ⁱⁱ Anna Woofenden, “This is God’s Table...finding church beyond the church walls” (Virgina, Harold Press, 2020)
p 120

ⁱⁱⁱAnna Woofenden, “This is God’s Table...finding church beyond the church walls” (Virgina, Harold Press, 2020)
p 245

^{iv}Anna Woofenden, “This is God’s Table...finding church beyond the church walls” (Virgina, Harold Press, 2020)
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