

Sunday, April 26, 2026

The Fourth Sunday Of Easter (Good Shepherd Sunday)

Festal Evensong

4:00 pm

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Prisca Lee-Pae

on

Ezra 3:1-13; Ephesians 2:11-22

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No Longer Strangers: Built Together in Christ

While St. Thomas Church does not appear to display this particular sign, in many Episcopal churches across this country, you will see a familiar blue and white sign: “The Episcopal Church Welcomes You.” I hope that none of you have ever suffered the misfortune of walking in—trusting solely in those words—only to find yourselves unwelcome. Because the truth is, a sign alone cannot make a church welcoming. Of course, you can rest assured that St. Thomas Church welcomes everyone, even without that specific sign.

This reminds me of a story told by a Chinese-American Episcopal priest. He served the Church faithfully for decades, even working in the Presiding Bishop’s office. One Sunday, while visiting a predominantly white Episcopal parish, instead of being welcomed, he was directed to a Chinese congregation and told, in effect, to go to “his own church.”

Conversely, a woman from an Asian-majority congregation once asked a Chinese-American parishioner here at St. Thomas, “*Why do you come to this church instead of going to a Chinese church?*”

These moments reveal a painful truth: even within the sanctuary, we are prone to building walls.

In our reading from Ezra, we see the people of Israel returning from exile to rebuild the foundation of the Temple. It was a moment of profound unity. They gathered “as one” (Ezra 3:1). Yet, it was also a moment of mixed emotion. While the young shouted for joy, the elders—who remembered the first Temple—wept aloud.

Building a holy place is rarely easy. It requires us to hold space for different experiences, different languages, and different griefs. But as Paul writes in Ephesians, the architecture of the New Covenant is different. We are no longer building with stone and mortar alone; we are being built together into a “holy temple in the Lord.”

We humans are experts at construction—not of temples, but of walls. We use religion, social class, gender, and race as boundaries to define who is “in” and who is “out.”

But Jesus crossed those walls as if they were made of mist. He spoke to the Samaritan woman; He ate with tax collectors; He touched the leper. As the theologian Karl Barth noted, “Jesus is himself the established

kingdom of God.” He did not just talk about peace; He *is* our peace. He did not just talk about the kingdom of God; He *is* the kingdom of God.

In Christ, the “dividing wall of hostility” has been broken down. According to the Pew Research Center, while the Episcopal Church remains approximately 90% white, our Pan-Asian Ministry is not just about changing those demographics or “recruiting” members. It is about the maturation of our church.

It is a natural human inclination to seek out those who are like us. We feel at ease when we don’t have to explain our culture or struggle with a language barrier. But if we only desire to stay in our comfort zones, we have no real need for Christ.

The peace Paul proclaims is not a “nice feeling.” It is a peace achieved through the self-sacrifice of the Cross. It is a peace that takes two vastly different groups—Jew and Gentile, immigrant and native-born—and forges them into one new humanity.

I will be honest with you: there were times I harbored resentment toward God. I asked, “*Why did You bring me to the United States?*” I had a comfortable life in Korea. Here, I faced the “foreignness” of language, culture, and racial discrimination. Even my sense of belonging became challenges. I encountered forms of exclusion I would never have experienced had I remained in Korea. But I realized that when I was in Korea, part of the privileged class, I could never truly understand the migrant workers I tried to help. Now, having walked in the shoes of an immigrant, I have begun to understand, even if only a little.

Christ came to earth to show us that while we wear different shoes, those differences are not a problem to be solved—they are a gift to be integrated.

The Church is still under construction. This community is still being formed into God’s holy temple, with Christ as the cornerstone and the apostles and prophets as the foundation.

St. Thomas Church’s commitment to welcoming and including people of many backgrounds—especially through the Pan-Asian Ministry—is part of this holy work. It is a sign not of completion, but of growth. A sign that we are learning to live into the peace of Christ—a peace that goes beyond comfort and embraces difference.

Here, there are no foreigners or strangers. Only fellow citizens. Only members of God’s family. And so we continue to build—together—into the dwelling place of God.

I pray that the Lord’s abundant blessing may rest upon each of you, as this community continues to grow into the holy temple of the Lord, with Jesus Christ as its cornerstone.
