4th Sunday of Easter, First Eucharist  
Cycle A, 5.7.17  
Acts 2:14,36-41/1 Peter 2:20-25/John 10:1-10

JESUS’ STORY BECOMES OUR STORY

Throughout our lives, young or old, we are fascinated by stories. To really enjoy a story you have to use your imagination and pretend that you’re inside the story with the different characters and in the different places. You transport yourself to another time and place. In the story about Cinderella we find ourselves in a beautiful castle where Cinderella meets a charming prince. In Peter Pan we’re on a pirate ship with the evil Captain Hook. In Star Wars the story transports us to outer space and to other planets where we encounter all kinds of alien beings and strange creatures. The story about Minions can take place anytime and anywhere, since they supposedly have existed from the beginning of time.

With Moana we’re sailing on a beautiful Hawaiian ocean. One of my favorite stories is about Kevin in Home Alone. He lives in a suburb of Chicago and gets left behind when his large family leaves for a Christmas vacation in Paris. He has to defend his house from two robbers who think no one is home. In the end Kevion saves the day. He cleverly defeats the robbers and is reunited with his family. All good stories have a villain and a hero.

And the stories Jesus told in the Bible are no different. Today he tells the story about the villains – the thieves and robbers who try to steal the sheep, and the hero – the shepherd who will do anything to protect his flock.

Jesus loved to tell stories and he used many images and examples to explain God’s love for us. In today’s gospel reading he tells us: “I am the Good Shepherd…” So we transport ourselves to the time and place where Jesus lived – places like Bethlehem and Nazareth, the Sea of Galilee and the Holy City Jerusalem.

In Jesus’ day, shepherd’s had a hard life and no one thought very highly of shepherds, but they were important because they protected the sheep which were very valuable. The sheep’s wool would be spun into clothing; its hide provided material for sandals and parchment for writing. The milk and meat of the sheep provided food. So we can see why thieves and robbers would want to steal the sheep.

The shepherd was there for the sheep if it got tangled in the bushes. He had a shepherd’s crook or staff with a hook at the end to pull up the sheep if it fell into a rocky crevice. If a sheep wandered away from the flock, the shepherd would go looking for it far and wide.

When Jesus said: “I am the Good Shepherd,” he wasn’t talking about sheep, but about us and his Church. Unlike the hired hand who would run away when the thief came, Jesus promised to stay with us and always be at our side.
The sheep learned to recognize the shepherd’s voice and follow when he called. How do we hear the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd? We hear Jesus’ voice in the Scriptures, the Bible stories that we hear at Mass and read at home. We hear the voice of Jesus in our parents and teachers and those who watch over us and care for us. They are entrusted by God with the responsibility of helping to lead us and guide us. And, most important, we hear the voice of Jesus in our own hearts because God has placed his Holy Spirit within us.

Just as Jesus is the Good Shepherd watching over us, his flock, he asks us to take care of one another, especially the week and the poor and all those in need. He calls us to love one another, to forgive each other and to try our best to live in friendship and peace with all people.

Today in your first Holy Communion, Jesus gives you his own life. In the Eucharist Jesus lives within us. Jesus enters your life and your story. Jesus makes a promise to us; we make a promise to him – to love God and care for one another, being peacemakers, and being people who want to share. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, leads us home and brings us together as the community of the Church – brothers and sisters of one another in God’s family.

Boys and girls, you’ve been waiting for this day for a long time and we’re so happy that it’s finally here. Jesus has been waiting too because he chose you to be his a long time ago. He made you his own on the day of your Baptism. Now he shares his life with you once again in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Let Jesus be a part of your story every day and you will have a story worth sharing with everyone because it will be a story of faith, hope and love.