

April 25, 2021 - Fourth Sunday of Easter - Good Shepherd Sunday

Acts 4:5-12 - Salvation in the name of Jesus

The First Reading for last Sunday contained the message of Peter after healing the lame man at the Temple gate.

We talked about how one of the strongest evidences of the reality of the resurrection is the changed lives of the first followers of Jesus.

How could you account for the tremendous change that took place in Peter from the night when he denied Jesus in order to save his own skin except by acknowledging that Peter had seen that Jesus was alive.

Verse 4 – But many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand.

This Sunday's First Reading takes place the next day, after Peter and John had been arrested and put in custody overnight.

⁵The next day [the] rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, ⁶with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" ⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, ¹⁰let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. ¹¹This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; he has become the cornerstone.'

¹²There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

Psalms 118: 22 – "chief cornerstone" - Rejected stones might be used in other parts of the building, but they would never become the cornerstone or the capstone (the first and last stones to be put in place). See also 1 Peter 2: 7.

Do you believe that "there is salvation in no one else" – that there is "no other name by which we must be saved"?

Cf. John 14: 6 – "No one comes to the Father except through me."

Psalm 23 - The Lord is My Shepherd

¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters.

³He restores my soul. He leads me along right pathways for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff - they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Notice the pronouns – I/me/my – He/his – You

The reason I am able to say, "I shall not want," "I fear no evil," and "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever" is because

"The Lord is my shepherd" – "He makes me lie down" – "He leads me" – "He restores"

*The pronoun changes from "he" to "you" when the Psalmist enters into the valley of the shadow of death
"You are with me" – "Your rod and staff – they comfort me"*

*Who in your life would be the most difficult person to sit down at a table with?
What if God were to invite the two of you over for dinner at the same time?*

When in your life have you most felt your cup most overflow?

1 John 3:16-24 - Love in truth and action

¹⁶We know love by this, that Jesus laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

Why would I not want to love, follow, and be with someone who laid down or would lay down His life for me?

¹⁸Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

How do you do at loving not just in word or speech, but in truth and action?

²⁰whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

We need a God who is greater than our hearts, because our feelings can be unstable and our hearts will often condemn us.

Is knowing that God knows everything a source of comfort and joy, or fear and frustration, for you?

²⁴All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them.

"Abide" is language that John also used in John 15 – the branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the vine

John 10: 11-18 - Jesus is the Good Shepherd

In John 10 Jesus called Himself both the gate for the sheep (verse 7) and the good shepherd (verse 11)

In calling Himself the good shepherd, I believe that Jesus was identifying Himself as the shepherd of Psalm 23

Verse 3 – He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Verse 4 – He goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.

Verse 9 – Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.

Verse 10 – The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Verse 11 – The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Verse 13 – The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.

Verse 14 – I know my own, and my own know me. Cf. abide language in 1 John 3: 24