

The Fourth Sunday of Easter - Year B - 26th April, 2015

This week the challenge to live the resurrection continues. By combining the Good Shepherd metaphor with John's call for love and Peter's proclamation of God's grace in Christ, the Lectionary has some strong words for leaders, but also for all Christ-followers. God life is to be enjoyed as a priceless gift, but it is also to be received as a transforming influence, and shared as a grace-filled, love-bringing reality.

May the Good Shepherd fill us with life, and inspire us to be good shepherds to others as we worship this week.

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

Acts 4 : 5-12

The followers of Jesus soon antagonised the Jewish authorities by preaching his resurrection. Peter explained to them how the power of Jesus live son because God raised him from the dead.

1 John 3 : 16-24

We continue to read John's first letter of Christian love, and hear that his must result in loving action. A clear conscience opens our way to God.

John 10 : 11-18

The ancient idea of a leader as a good shepherd of his people has been fulfilled in Jesus. He knows us intimately, and loves us enough to die for us.

Click here to view the readings

http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Acts%204:%205-12%0A%2BOR%0AEzekiel%2034:%201-10%0Acw%20Psalm%2023%0A1%20John%203:%2016-24%0AJohn%2010:%2011-18

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

Almighty God,
who showest to them that be in error
the light of thy truth,
to the intent that they may return
into the way of righteousness;
Grant unto all them that are admitted
into the fellowship of Christ's Religion,
that they may eschew those things
that are contrary to their profession,
and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same;
through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Collect Two

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life:
Raise us, who trust in him,

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from the death of sin to the life of righteousness,
that we may seek those things which are above,
where he reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 1

Presider or deacon

Gathered in the care of the good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep, let us pray to God who knows our every need.

Deacon or other leader

For the holy churches in every place, and for the unity of all.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For this holy assembly and for all who gather in the name of the risen Christ.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For *NN* and all illumined by the light of Christ.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For *N* our bishop and the presbyters, the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For the world and its leaders, our nation and its people.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For all those in danger and need, the sick and the suffering, the strayed and the lost.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For those who walk in death's dark valley.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For ourselves, our families, and those we love.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

Remembering *N - Parish saint* - and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, who soothes our head with oil and fills our cup with wine. Hear the prayers we offer for every need, and revive us with your Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 2

As a flock in constant need, we behold our risen Christ and are quick to pray
"Good Shepherd, hear us" and to respond,
Good Shepherd, help us.

As Christians in this community, there remains a disparate character in our traditions and practices as Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox communions. We ask that the gospel may not be obscured by our differences or thereby deplored. Good Shepherd, hear us.
Good Shepherd, help us

That we may discover the resurrected Christ in life's daily encounters with others, Good Shepherd, hear us.
Good Shepherd, help us

That terrorist activities may be curtailed and that extremist positions may give way to creative reconciliation. Good Shepherd, hear us.
Good Shepherd, help us

That those who have become part of Christ's fold through Holy Baptism may be drawn to continued inquiry, study, and demonstration of their faith. Good Shepherd, hear us.
Good Shepherd, help us

As parents, grandparents, godparents and friends, we neglect the spiritual welfare of our children. We fail to articulate our faith in Christ verbally and in our walk. Forgive us, compassionate Lord, Good Shepherd, hear us.
Good Shepherd, help us

The glory alone is yours, O Lord. You seek us before we think of you. You receive us graciously, when we turn to you. You become the source of our encouragement. We thank and praise you for your care
Amen.

POST COMMUNION

Merciful Father,
you gave your Son Jesus Christ to be the good shepherd,
and in his love for us to lay down his life and rise again.
Keep us always under his protection,
and give us grace to follow in his steps;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS

Mighty God,
in whom we know the power of redemption,
you stand among us in the shadows of our time.
As we move through every sorrow and trial of this life,
uphold us with knowledge of the final morning

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when, in the glorious presence of your risen Son,
we will share in his resurrection,
redeemed and restored to the fullness of life
and forever freed to be your people. Amen.

Living God,
long ago, faithful women
proclaimed the good news
of Jesus' resurrection,
and the world was changed forever.
Teach us to keep faith with them,
that our witness may be as bold,
our love as deep,
and our faith as true. Amen.

Creator of the universe,
you made the world in beauty,
and restore all things in glory
through the victory of Jesus Christ.
We pray that, wherever your image is still disfigured
by poverty, sickness, selfishness, war and greed,
the new creation in Jesus Christ may appear in justice, love, and peace,
to the glory of your name. Amen.

O God, your Son remained with his disciples after his resurrection,
teaching them to love all people as neighbors.
As his disciples in this age,
we offer our prayers on behalf of the universe
in which we are privileged to live
and our neighbors with whom we share it...

...Intercessions

Open our hearts to your power moving
around us and between us and within us,
until your glory is revealed in our love of both friend and enemy,
in communities transformed by justice and compassion,
and in the healing of all that is broken. Amen.

Holy God,
you have called us to follow in the way of your risen Son,
and to care for those who are our companions,
not only with words of comfort, but with acts of love.
Seeking to be true friends of all,
we offer our prayers on behalf of the church and the world....

...Intercessions

Guide us in the path of discipleship,
so that, as you have blessed us,
we may be a blessing for others,
bringing the promise of the kingdom near
by our words and deeds. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ,
God invites us to bring our doubts and fears,

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our joys and concerns, our petitions and praise,
and offer them for the earth and all its creatures....

...Intercessions

Receive these prayers, O God,
and transform us through them,
that we may have eyes to see and hearts to understand
not only what you do on our behalf,
but what you call us to do
so that your realm will come to fruition in glory. Amen.

Shepherd of all,
by laying down your life for your flock
you reveal your love for all.
Lead us from the place of death
to the place of abundant life,
that guided by your care for us,
we may rightly offer our lives
in love for you and our neighbors. Amen.

LECTIONARY NOTES 1

Acts 4:5-12:

- Notice the content of Peter's preaching, and really, most of the preaching in Acts. Instead of preaching about the things Jesus talked about, the apostles preach instead about Jesus' identity. But they seem to share very little about his parables, etc.
- "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven . . . " How quickly the apostles make the gospel and exclusive message instead of an inclusive one, as Jesus did. How easy it is to change the whole tone of Jesus' work into something different!
- Still, Peter speaks up and speaks boldly in some very difficult situations. When have you been so bold?

Psalm 23:

- Ah, perhaps the one passage of scripture that most (English speaking) people, regardless of their usual preference of translation, prefer to hear in the poetry of the King James version, myself included. Just a part of our identity as people of faith.
- "I shall not want." Hmm. I think we skip right over this little phrase. We like to hear about our overflowing cup. Less interesting to us, less believable, is that we could be without want. How do we get there?
- Have you ever tried writing this as a reverse Psalm? Verse by verse, reverse the meaning of the phrases. Not necessarily point for point, but in the sense of it. Instead of "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," try, "I have no one to lead me, and my need is boundless." I've been led in this process, and led my Bible Study in it. At first you might ask, "Why do it this way?" But, especially when in a group, reading back all the hopeless examples of our life without God, we see the power of this psalm more clearly.

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- Like all well-known texts, there is a danger of it communicating nothing fresh to us. This psalm is often used at funerals - many people know it by heart. Many find it comforting and strengthening. What else can it be? Challenging? Guiding us?

1 John 3:16-24:

- An excellent passage, and one that challenges us. "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother and sister in need and yet refuses help?" Indeed. How? The author's words call us to repentance and accountability.
- "Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." I think of the *Extreme* song, "More Than Words." I doubt the singers were speaking about the gospel message, but we can apply it nonetheless. Words are powerful, but no matter how eloquent they aren't a substitute for acting in love.
- "God is greater than our hearts." Amen!
- Believe, and love - in action. Seems simple enough. And yet...

John 10:11-18:

- John 10 is one of my favorite chapters in the Bible, and I love the image of the Good Shepherd. We've cleaned this image up a lot in artwork today, in church images, but shepherding wasn't clean and easy work, resulting in a Jesus with fresh-looking robes and flowing, combed hair.
- "I know my own sheep and my sheep know me." Jesus argues that only the shepherd is truly invested in the well-being of the sheep. Everyone else is motivated by obligation, by reward from earnings, etc. In whom are you truly invested? Who is invested in you?
We all have power. Jesus took the powerful path of giving up power. Have you ever given up power? How?

By Beth Quick

LECTIONARY NOTES 2

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

If the Easter season is about anything, it's about restoration, life, and God's compassionate care for God's people. These are the themes that come through the readings for this week. In Acts the disciples, who are put on trial for healing the lame man outside of the Temple, proudly proclaim Jesus as the name by which the healing has happened, and by which humanity is to be saved. In David's famous Psalm, God's care as shepherd is celebrated, and in John's letter the love of God that is revealed in Christ's sacrifice is to be passed on through those who are Christ's disciples as they choose to love one another and lay down their lives for one another. Finally, in John 10 Jesus proclaims himself as the Good Shepherd who cares for the sheep with commitment and courage, and who lays down his life for the sheep. But, in this loving sacrifice lies the hope of resurrection – Jesus confidently asserts that he will take up his life again. The message is an important one as we reflect on the resurrection over the next few weeks. Resurrection can easily be seen as an individual experience of life beyond the grave, but the Gospel reveals that it is so much more than that. As much as it does offer personal renewal through God's life, and the promise of eternity, resurrection also calls us to be life-carriers – shepherds who, like Jesus, lay our lives down for others. It is the hope of resurrection that makes sacrifice possible, and that gives us the strength and courage to risk loving and serving others even when it hurts.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: There are two obvious implications in today's theme that present themselves. The first relates to the crucial issue of leadership. The realities of corruption, incivility, self-interest and petty partisanship are present in pretty much every government in the world. In the corporate sector, greed, quick-

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fixes and profit-above-all-else easily taint leaders. Even in the sphere of the church, the temptation to seek fame, wealth and influence too often takes precedence over compassionate and strong leadership. Like the people of Israel in Jesus' time, we long for Good Shepherds who lead with grace, compassion, wisdom and justice. The examples we have – Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, Wangari Maathai, Gandhi – inspire and challenge us and give us hope that the leadership our world needs is possible. For those of us who exercise leadership in any capacity, the Easter vision calls us to use our influence to bring life to others, to serve others, and to work sacrificially for the good of our communities. It is this leadership alone that can make a positive difference to the great crises of our time at every level.

The second implication of today's theme flows from this leadership challenge. It's the call to recognise that resurrection life is not just a gift for personal blessing, but is a powerful energy that is intended to flow between people, bringing life, wholeness and justice wherever it flows. As such, the call to love one another sacrificially applies not just to those in leadership, but to every Christ-follower. The resurrection life we celebrate is meant to connect us with others and motivate us to seek their best, contributing in whatever way we can to a world of grace, peace, justice and love. As we seek to live Christ's resurrected life together, our care and compassion has the potential to address every crisis from poverty to climate change. All it takes is the vision and hope, the courage and commitment and the faith to follow the movement of God's Spirit and the life that God's Spirit brings.

LOCAL APPLICATION: God's compassion for us and God's desire to restore and enliven us shine through every moment of the Easter season. The mystery and challenge of this divine quest lies in that it operates on personal, local and global levels. As we begin to live as resurrected individuals, we cannot help but connect with resurrection communities, and that in turn brings the life of resurrection to the world. For most of us, though, the beginning point is personal and local. This means that, first of all, in our families and friendships, and in how we order our lives, God calls us to embody the compassion and sacrificial care of resurrection. Any time our words and actions bring life, joy and peace to others, we share resurrection. Any time we lay down our lives for one another, we manifest resurrection life. Then, as we connect with one another in resurrection communities, we are able to bring life to our neighbourhoods, impacting others with God's care and grace. This means that much of how we have "structured" and lived our faith as Christ followers may need to change. From exclusive communities, we will need to learn acceptance and welcome. From being people of judgment and criticism, we will need to become people of love and forgiveness. From being those who focus only on a few issues that directly affect us, we will need to contribute to causes that bring life to people we may never meet. The life that resurrection brings cannot be contained. It breaks out wherever it can, and those who seek to live resurrection can only follow where it leads. When we try to contain it or control it, we only end up falling out of step with Christ. This means that every action, word and thought can be either the reflection of resurrection, or an obstacle to making it visible. The choice is ours – we can be Good Shepherds who care for and lay our lives down for those around us, or not.

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

Day 1 - "[A Visitor, a Mapmaker and a Banquet](#)," the Rev. Benjamin Anthony, *Based on Psalm 23*. "Evasive spirituality and withering religious critics miss what truly stands at the heart of the Christian religion: an intimate relationship between the God of the universe with each and every particular human being. Even when that much is acknowledged, the manifestation of the relationship is, without exception, dismissed and disregarded. For what emerges out of God's love for people and the love people return to God is a community attentive to human need and intent upon mutuality and human flourishing. Religion, at its best, shapes such a community. Theology develops the vocabulary to evolve, sustain and reflect upon the life and practices of these communities."

"The bedrock of this vocabulary and these practices are the words of scripture. As much as the Bible is made into a site of contest and a supplier of cultural weapons, its richness exceeds these distortions."

<http://day1.org/1249-a-visitor-a-mapmaker-and-a-banquet>

America - "[I'll Take Care of It!](#)" Dianne Bergant, - I am the good shepherd" (Jn 10:11)

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"Today is traditionally known as Good Shepherd Sunday. For many of us, mention of sheep conjures up the image of a warm coat or the memory of a good meal. We may remember the nursery rhyme "Mary had a little lamb," or the television hand puppet named Lamb Chop, but very few of us regard sheep as familiar companions. Thus we might not appreciate the depths of intimacy captured in the declaration, "I am the good shepherd.""

http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=2943

America - "Poor Little Sheep Who Have Found the Way," John R. Donahue - *Beloved, we are God's children now. (1 Jn. 3:2)* "The Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Easter in all three cycles of the Lectionary readings is from the Johannine allegory of Jesus as both door to the sheep fold and shepherd (John 10). Then, until Pentecost, the Gospels switch from appearances of the risen Jesus to selections from the farewell discourses in John 13 to 17. In the New Testament, especially in John, the passion, death, resurrection and giving of the Spirit are one saving event, though they are played out over a period of time. In these parting words of Jesus to his earthy followers we hear the voice of the risen Jesus speaking to the church through the ages.

"Jesus twice describes himself as the good shepherd, who knows the sheep and gives his life for them—in contrast with hirelings, who neglect the sheep. The translation "good" does not capture the nuance of the Greek, which suggests also an authentic or model shepherd. Behind the rich imagery of this passage are the frequent Old Testament uses of the shepherd image to describe God's care: for the people, important leaders in salvation history, Moses, David, anointed kings and the hoped-for Messiah. Negatively, Jesus' contrast with the hirelings evokes God's polemic against false shepherds (leaders), who neglect the sheep and exploit them for their own gain (Ezek. 34:11-31). It is unique to John that a messianic figure will give his life for the sheep. Though this anticipates Jesus' passion and death, the Greek expression, literally "put (or place) my life for the sake of others" implies that Jesus' whole life and teaching is a model for good shepherding."

http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=2077

Feed My Sheep - Frederick Buechner Sermon Illustrations. - Here is an excerpt from Frederick Buechner's "Peter," first published in *Peculiar Treasures* and reprinted in *Beyond Words*: According to Paul, the first person Jesus came back to see after Easter morning was Peter. What he said and what Peter said nobody will ever know, and maybe that's just as well. Their last conversation on this earth, however, is reported in the Gospel of John.

<http://frederickbuechner.com/content/weekly-sermon-illustration-feed-my-sheep>

What's Love Got To Do With It?" the Rev. Shari L. Rates, Day 1

1 John 3:16-2. Through an extraordinary story, what Mary Johnson has been able to do within her lifetime speaks volumes about unconditional love under the anvil of forgiveness. In February of 1993, her 20-year-old son was shot in the head by Oshea Israel, a 16 year old, after an argument at a party in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Originally wanting to see justice, she turned her anger into compassion. Now she and Israel are next-door neighbors. Today, she counsels mothers of murdered children while he visits prisons and churches. He shares about forgiveness and reconciliation.

http://day1.org/3724-whats_love_got_to_do_with_it

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CHILDREN

Worshiping with Children - Amongst ideas here - Explore the image of Christ as the rejected stone that turned out to be the cornerstone in 4:11. Use children's blocks etc
<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/year-b-fourth-sunday-of-easter-april-29.html>

Sermons4Kids

<http://www.sermons4kids.com/>

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

The King Of Love My Shepherd Is
The Lord's My Shepherd
Great Me, O Thou Great Jehovah
O Loving Lord, Who Art Forever Seeking
We Shall Go Out With Hope Of Resurrection
God Of Justice
God Of This City
Mighty To Save
Hear Our Praises
Only In You