

Sunday, April 25, 2021
Fourth Sunday of Easter
Reflections by Juel Pierce

First Reading

Acts 4:5-12

Peter and John had been arrested the previous day because they were proclaiming the news of the resurrection to the people. In today's reading, Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit so that he can proclaim salvation in Jesus' name to the religious authorities.

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;
it 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."

Reflection

This text is a narrative of what happened after Peter and John were arrested for preaching in the temple. For why they were arrested, read Acts 4:1-4. Who interrogated them the next day? (verses 5-6) Surely this was an attempt to intimidate them! What

was the question they asked them? (verse 7) How did Peter respond? (verses 8-9) What was their witness? (verses 10-11) In verse 11, Peter is quoting Psalm 118, which surely surprised them. Peter summed up what he wanted to say in verse 12. What enabled Peter to speak to those who had arrested them? Have you ever been in a situation when someone challenges you over your belief in Jesus? That might not happen so much to us. How do you know when the Holy Spirit is encouraging you to speak?

Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. (Ps. 23:1)

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

²**The LORD makes me lie down | in green pastures
and leads me be- | side still waters.**

³You restore my | soul, O LORD,
and guide me along right pathways | for your name's sake.

⁴**Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I
shall | 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, and my cup is | running over.

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

Reflection

As you read this psalm, what is your response to it? Do you have a favorite verse? When I was a chaplain, I often recited it (from

memory) when someone was dying, to comfort them or their loved ones if it was appropriate.

Second Reading

1 John 3:16-24

Jesus' death on our behalf is the clearest demonstration of divine love. This is the very love we share with others, not just through our words but especially through our deeds. In sharing such love we fulfill God's commandments.

¹⁶We know love by this, that [Jesus Christ] laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

¹⁸Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. ¹⁹And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him ²⁰whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; ²²and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

²³And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

Reflection

How does John the letter writer tell us that we know what love is? (verse 16) Who shows us what love is? If we know what love is, what will we do? John enlarges our idea of what it means to lay

down our lives for our neighbors. What does he encourage? (verse 17) Why isn't saying, "I love you" enough? (verse 18) This reminds me of the passage from James about faith. (James 2:14-20) John says essentially the same thing about love—if you can't show love, you don't have love, no matter what you say. How does John say we can be confident in God's presence? (verses 19-20) I take John's saying that we can be confident even if our consciences condemn us as a comment on what the leaders of the Jewish people were trying to do to Peter and John—make them uncomfortable in their consciences for going against what they were taught before they became Jesus' disciples. How will we know that what we are doing is right? (verses 21-22) What are the commandments that John refers to? (verse 23) How do we know if we are following those commandments and doing right? (verse 24)

Gospel

John 10:11-18

In language that recalls the twenty-third psalm, Jesus describes himself as the shepherd who cares for his sheep. He is willing to die for them, and he is able to overcome death for them.

[Jesus said:] ¹¹"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock,

one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

Reflection

What does Jesus call himself in this text? (verse 11) What makes a shepherd a good shepherd? How does someone who is not the shepherd treat the sheep? (verse 12) Why? (verse 13) What makes Jesus the good shepherd? (verse 14) Jesus compares his love for the sheep to God’s love for Jesus. (verse 15) How does Jesus show his love for us? How is Jesus’ love for the sheep different from the sheep’s love for one another? (verse 16) We don’t know everyone who is in Jesus’ flock, even though we belong together. Why does Jesus know that God loves Jesus? (verse 17) Who tells Jesus what to do in order that God will love him? (verse 18) What is God’s command to Jesus? How would you compare that to Jesus’ decision to lay down his life for the sheep?