

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2018

## The Fourth Sunday of Easter

White



### Collect

Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life: raise us, who trust in him, from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, that we may seek those things which are above, where he reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

### Acts 4:5-12 English Standard Version (ESV)

#### Peter and John Before the Council

4<sup>5</sup> On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, <sup>6</sup> with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. <sup>7</sup> And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” <sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, <sup>9</sup> if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. <sup>11</sup> This Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men<sup>[c]</sup> by which we must be saved.”

**Footnotes:** a. Greek *This one*. b. Greek *the head of the corner*. c. The Greek word *anthropoi* refers here to both men and women.

**COMMENT:** This is another of the sermons intended to show how Peter and the other apostles preached during the early days of the church. The kerygma of the early Church (= proclamation) sought to show how the Christian tradition grew out of the Jewish tradition and yet also clearly defined the distinction between them. While this passage appears to present a keen eyewitness account, as did the synoptic

Gospels, it represents the views of the Apostolic Church in its continuing conflict with Jewish authorities. Most probably this conflict was particularly severe in Jerusalem in the years immediately after the resurrection. It outlasted the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 69-70 and reached its height in the early 80s, when Jewish Christians were banned from all synagogues. By that time, the Apostolic Church had become predominantly a Gentile community. In many respects, this passage reflects the Gentile hostility toward Jewish authorities and clearly defines the discontinuity of the two traditions. In this sermon Peter declared the fact and the power of Christ's resurrection before the same supreme council of religious leaders, the Sanhedrin, who had condemned Jesus and brought about his death. If we assume the scholarly consensus that Luke-Acts was written for the Christians in Rome circa AD 80, the courage of the Apostles would have had a very positive influence on the Christian community still reeling from Nero's persecution in the 60s when Peter, Paul and James had been martyred. The healing of the man at the gate of temple had a wider meaning than giving strength to crippled legs. As in Jesus' own healing miracles, to be fully healed meant to be brought into a right relationship with God through faith. Thus healing and salvation were one and the same spiritual experience. Luke underlines this emphasis by quoting a favourite New Testament reinterpretation of Psalm 118:22 and reiterating the unique salvation found in Jesus alone (verses 11-12).

### **John 10:11-18** English Standard Version (ESV)

#### **I Am the Good Shepherd**

10<sup>11</sup> I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup> He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

**COMMENT:** It may be helpful to read this passage from the beginning at verse 1 and then to read Ezekiel 34 immediately after. There seems little doubt that Jesus made that Old Testament passage the basis for his own ministry as Messiah. There are numerous other Old Testament references to the way the LORD, like the shepherds of biblical times, guided, cared for and rescued Israel, “the sheep of his flock.” For some

of these, read also Isaiah 40:11; 49:9-10; 63:14; Psalms 23; 80:1; 95:7; 100:3. One of the enduring images of Jesus is that of the good shepherd. Romantic art and poetry, however, may well have robbed us of the truth about this passage. Its startlingly different view of how the shepherd performed his duties is the willingness of the shepherd to lay down his life for the sheep. It also challenges the traditional rabbinic attitude toward shepherds. In his Jerusalem in the time of Jesus, shepherds were regarded as completely untrustworthy, more likely to steal from their master than faithfully perform their task of caring for the sheep. Frequently shepherds were ostracized from their community. Yet this reading reflects exactly how the Apostolic Church regarded Jesus as they had known him. They also recognized that he had not been the victim, in the same way as the lamb without blemish was the victim used for the Passover sacrifice, because he fulfilled the role of sacrifice, by taking charge of his own life and death in the way he gave himself into the hands of his enemies (verses 17-18). This is far from the sentimental pictures of the shepherd with his flock of sheep and lambs we see in church art and stained glass windows. Rather, it is a brutally honest discernment of who Jesus is and what he had done for us.

### **Psalm 23** *Dominus regit me* Grail Psalter

#### **℟️ The Lord is my shepherd: there is nothing I shall want.**

<sup>1</sup> The Lord is my shepherd;  
there is nothing I shall want.

<sup>2</sup> Fresh and green are the pastures  
where he gives me repose.

Near restful waters he leads me,  
<sup>3</sup> to revive my drooping spirit. ℟️

He guides me along the right path;  
he is true to his name.

<sup>4</sup> If I should walk in the valley of darkness  
no evil would I fear.

You are there with your crook and your staff;  
with these you give me comfort. ℟️

<sup>5</sup> You have prepared a banquet for me  
in the sight of my foes.

My head you have anointed with oil;  
my cup is overflowing. ℟️

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me  
all the days of my life.

In the Lord's own house shall I dwell  
for ever and ever. ℟️

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit,  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.**

**COMMENT:** No psalm is better known or more loved as a prayer of trust in God who cares for us now and forever. Only the first four verses depict the pastoral scene of the shepherd caring for his flock in several different circumstances from pleasant pasturage to grave danger. Another image in verse 4 refers to a banquet, or at least a meal provided for a refugee from pursuing enemies. Tribal custom among pastoral Semites dictated that anyone fleeing from enemies bent on the rough justice of the wilderness could appeal for refuge from any encampment he might happen upon. Pursuing enemies could not take the refugee while he was guest at supper in the sheltering encampment. The additional imagery of the guest being anointed with pungent oil and served an overflowing cup suggests an elaborate banquet provided by an exceptionally hospitable host. Generations of interpreters have incorrectly attributed the psalm to David, the shepherd boy who became Israel's legendary great hero-king. However satisfying religiously, this is more of a romantic than a realistic interpretation. In the closing verse 6 the picture of the tent melds into that of the temple. While it is not inconceivable that David did serve as a priest-king in some instances, his desire to build a temple in new capital city of Jerusalem went unfulfilled. The biblical record tells of him bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, but it was his son, Solomon, born to David and Bathsheba, who is credited with the construction of the temple.

### **Short Preface**

But chiefly are we bound to praise you because you raised him gloriously from the dead. For he is the true paschal lamb who was offered for us, and has taken away the sin of the world. By his death he has destroyed death, and by his rising to life again he has restored to us everlasting life.

### **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. **Amen.**

### **Blessing**

The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the eternal covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among *you*, and remain with *you* always. **Amen.**