

Sunday 7th May 2017

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 2:42-47 English Standard Version (ESV)

The Fellowship of the Believers

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe^[a] came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Footnotes: a. or *fear*

COMMENT: The new faith community needed a specific organisational structure to maintain itself. To this end some very practical steps were taken: Instruction by the apostles, the building of friendships, a communal meal and worship. Each one of these was of particular importance. Most of the early converts were from the poorer classes rather than the wealthy. Note that they were still accepted as faithful Jews worshiping in the temple. The formal break with Judaism came a number of years later.

John 10:1-10 English Standard Version (ESV)

I Am the Good Shepherd

10¹ “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”⁶ This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷ So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

COMMENT: We have here words that John has recounted after decades and reflects what were then the only scriptures – the Hebrew Old Testament. – for example Psalms 23:1, 28:9, 80:1, Isaiah 40:11, Jeremiah 31:10, Ezekiel 34:15, Amos 3:12, and Micah 7:14, where God is seen as the Shepherd of Israel. In the details of this passage we also find an understanding of the life of humble Palestinian shepherds far removed from our romantic but highly urbanised view of what a shepherd’s life was like. Every village in the Judean uplands had a common sheepfold where flocks found shelter at night, especially in winter. Stealing sheep was not unknown. Thieves, whether human or animal, would not usually enter by the gate, but over or through a breach in the wall (verses 1-2). Every morning each shepherd stood at the gate and called his own sheep from the communal flock. Responding only to their own shepherd’s peculiar call, the sheep filed out to be led away to feed wherever pasture could be found (verses 3-5). If too far from the village to return at night, the shepherd sheltered his flock out on the hills in a rude fold with low stone or wattle walls. There was no gate, so the shepherd himself lay down across the opening to protect his flock from marauding animals or thieves (verses 7-9 – “I am the door”).

The first three Gospels are replete with parables given by Jesus – these seem to be missing in John’s Gospel – yet these words are John’s recasting of parables by Jesus (noted in the text as ‘figure of speech’). Nonetheless, they speak to us of the ultimate significance of faith in Jesus as the way to abundant and eternal life. Abundant living can be defined only by the depth and meaning of one’s spirituality, not in materialistic terms sadly characteristic of many Christians and non-Christians alike.

Psalm 23 *Dominus regit me* Grail Psalter.

℟ The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.

¹ The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.

² Fresh and green are the pastures
where he gives me repose.

Near restful waters he leads me,

³ to revive my drooping spirit. **℟**

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

⁴ 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. **℟**

⁵ You have prepared a banquet for me
in the sight of my foes.

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

⁶ 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: Ancient tradition and a title in the Hebrew Scriptures claimed that this favourite psalm was from the hand of David, Israel's shepherd king. Though not entirely impossible, it is highly unlikely. Reference to the Lord's house in verse 6 would indicate a later date, since the temple was not built until after David had died. Even then there were many other local places where worship also occurred. In public worship or private devotion, this psalm still moves countless faithful closer to God.

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.**