



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Easter 4, Year B
April 22, 2018

[RCL:] Acts 4:5-12; Psalm 23; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18

Acts 4:5-12

“The stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone” (verse 11).

As is often the case, the context of this passage is set in the portion of the text that is not included in the reading. Here, the situation is that Peter and John were preaching and rejoicing in the glory of the resurrected Christ. They had been healing the sick and doing “good deeds.” This really annoyed the priest of the temple (and, as we are told, the Sadducees). So, they were arrested. The next day all the good ol’ boys got together and asked, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” The question belies the fact that they already know the power and the name. What they wanted to know is if Peter and John made the same messianic claim. Peter and John replied that the deeds had been done in the name of Jesus Christ – the stone the Jews had rejected. A sort of “in your face!” to the Jewish establishment.

Often we read this passage focusing on the passage about the rejected stone cited above. But I would like for us to focus for a moment on our sources of power.

- How often in our own lives do we appeal to an outside authority for an excuse to explain what we are not capable of doing ourselves?
- While Peter and John had the name of the resurrected Christ to support them, how much do we delight in invoking the name of someone else in order to fill our own needs to be appreciated?
- When do we call on the power of the resurrected Lord to fill us with the joy and glee of the Holy Spirit?

Psalm 23

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want” (verse 1).

I cannot think of a better-known psalm, one that is recounted by heart. In the *Book of Common Prayer*, we have the opportunity to recite this psalm in the Daily Devotion (p. 143), at Maundy Thursday (p. 274), on Good Friday (p. 276), at Holy Baptism (p. 313), at the Thanksgiving for a Child (p. 443), in our Ministration to the Sick (p. 454), and perhaps the best known occasion, at Burial (pp. 476, 490).

This psalm calms the spirit and revives the soul with the assurance that the Lord our God walks with us in all our daily life, through joy and travails.

- With all of the quiet confidence afforded by this psalm, are we comfortable reciting it not thinking about our eventual walk with God?
- Is there greater meaning to be found in this psalm beyond considering the end of our lives?

1 John 3:16-24

“We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another” (verse 16).

First John was written to a community apparently besieged by antichrists; but the overall message of this epistle is one of love and that God is love. In the first part of this chapter, we are reminded that we are children of God and that even though we sin, we are loved and redeemed. The passage for today is directly linked to the gospel reading. It declares that Jesus laid down his life for us, and we should be willing to do the same for each other.

- Love, belief, and sacrifice are the themes. How prepared are we to believe without seeing; to love without knowing; and to sacrifice without losing?

John 10:11-18

Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (verse 11).

The passage leading into this text speaks of the difference between the shepherd who enters by the gate and the thief who enters the sheepfold by another route. Here he reiterates that the shepherd knows his sheep and the sheep know their shepherd. In the text for today, Jesus juxtaposes the “good shepherd” against the “hired hand.” The difference is not in their capacity to take care of sheep – although that may be an important issue. The difference is in ownership. The good shepherd owns the sheep; they are his and he is theirs. The hired hand is self-interested. As long as the interests of the sheep are aligned with the interests of the hired hand, everything is great. When interests diverge, however, it is clear: The hired hand looks out for his own wellbeing while the good shepherd takes care of his sheep. Jesus reminds us that he came to lay down his life for us, that we are his and he is ours. Again, a central theme running through this text is the love of God expressed through the gift of the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- When are we able to feel the comfort of knowing the one who enters by the gate to the sheepfold?
- How do we know we are loved? By our friends and family? By our God?
- Are you able to accept that God knows you and loves you – that we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand?

This Bible study, written by David Marker of the Bishop Kemper School for Ministry, originally ran for Easter 4 (B) on April 26, 2015.

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