

# Sermon: Easter 4

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April 22, 2018

Year B  
Acts 4:5-12  
Psalm 23  
1 John 3:16-24  
John 10:11-18

*The Lord is my Shepherd... I shall not be in want... surely your goodness and mercy... shall follow me... all the days of my life... and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever...* I did some internet searches... and the 23rd Psalm is almost everyone's favorite Psalm... and its' among the most popular psalms at funerals... because of its deeply reassuring words...

Joel LeMon... Associate Professor at Candler School of Theology... writes... after the description of the blessing that awaits the psalmist in the house of the Lord... the Table spread in the presence of enemies... the text again pictures the psalmist in motion... *Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life...* the word "follow" here... *radaph*... is better translated as "pursue"... a surprising verb... given that it is usually enemies that are pursuing the psalmist with an intent to overtake and destroy... further... in this same verse... the word "surely"... *'aq*... is better translated [as] "only"... thus it's not the enemies who are in hot pursuit... but instead... only goodness and mercy that will be chasing him... chasing all of us...

And moving from many to one... there are seven "I am" sayings in the Gospel of John... Jesus says that he is... the bread of life... the light of the world... the gate... the resurrection and the life... the way, and the truth, and the life... and the true vine... that's six...

The "I am" saying in today's Gospel... is the only one which actually refers to a person... to a vocation... to a job... Jesus says... I am the Good Shepherd... a pastoral reference to which his listeners could relate... but what does it mean to be good and caring... and to whom is Jesus good... and caring... and why is he saying this...

Just before this... in John 10:1-10... Jesus makes another pastoral comparison... he describes himself as the gate in the sheepfold... and you may remember me saying in a sermon last May... that sheepfolds had no gate *per se*... the shepherds themselves used to sleep across the sheepfold's opening... they became the gate... it was over them or around them... that thieves and bandits would have to climb to get to the sheep...

And just before that... in John Ch. 9... is the story about Jesus healing the man born blind... on the Sabbath... when no one was supposed to do any work... Jesus goes above and beyond what one would expect... or hope for... and they brought the man to the Pharisees... who seemed less impressed by this healing... and more hung up on when it was done... and the parents get questioned... and they deny any knowledge... it's like Court TV... and at the end of the chapter... in v. 39... you can almost hear Jesus saying... I came into this world to help those who can't see God's truth... to see it... and to show those who think they see it all... to understand how little they see... Jesus accuses the Pharisees... of being blind...

And v.16 in today's Epistle... speaks to me... jumps out at me... maybe kind of screams at me... especially when we look at current events... not just in this country... but around the world... *How 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?*

In The Christian Century... Executive Editor David Heim wrote... the British have a term... *jobsworth*... to describe a person who won't lift a finger to do more than the bare minimum their job requires... ask *jobsworths* to exert themselves... and they'll decline... saying... *It's more... than my job... is worth...* a *jobsworth* frustrates colleagues... and casts a cloud of lethargy over the workplace... and the worldview of the *jobsworth* is directly opposed to the one at the heart of 1 John... which calls on community members... and local... state... and national leaders to constantly look beyond themselves...

The healing that Jesus performed... was more than an act of charity or good will... it's not something Jesus did to feel better about himself... he was seamlessly enacting the words of the Psalmist... in this story... his goodness and mercy pursued the blind man... as it did with so many others whom he healed... or gave new life... or called by name... the way he called Lazarus to new life... and called Mary to new relationship... the way the man born blind heard Jesus' voice... before he saw him... and the Psalmist reminds us... that although our Good Shepherd makes us lie down in green pastures... and leads us beside still waters... every day that we're out in the world... and try to live lives of faith... we also return once and again to God's house... where a Table is set before us... and we are fed and nourished...

The hired hands are in it just for the paycheck... they're not invested in doing God's work... they run away when wolves prowl... when the common good is threatened... when tribalism exerts itself... but Jesus shows love in action... Jesus shows power and agency in sacrifice...

And Bp. Satterlee recently said... we always think of the other flocks... as people out there... who Jesus needs to bring to us... he invites us to think of ourselves... as the other sheep who Jesus must bring somewhere other than where we are... this frees us to let go of things... to embrace new ways... to be on a journey or a pilgrimage... to be open to others... instead of thinking we're the flock... that Jesus is going to bring others to us... he said we're the ones who need to be brought...

And so change... interacting with new people... taking on new approaches... are ways that Jesus is bringing us to him and to his other sheep... there's Grace in that too... and it brings all his sheep to him... that they may be One...

So one of the questions that rises up for me is... in order to belong to the fold... must we take on the label Christian... and must we insist that others do too...

Professor Wil Gafney wrote... 1John 3 is an extended treatise on the love of God for us... and the love we ought to have for one another... it is directed to the Christian community... vv. 23-24 describe the parameters of this community: belief and trust in Jesus... and love for one another... notably missing are all the doctrinal... cultural... theological... and interpretive issues that Christians use [today] to divide ourselves into camps...

1 Corinthians 13:12 says... *For now we see in a mirror... dimly...* the Gk. word for dimly... is *enigma*... so if what we see now... what we know now... is a riddle... is mystery... if it's we humans who create denominational divisions... and religious divides... how can we see past and transcend the words and labels we use... and arrive at a common experience... can we all belong to the fold... based on how we behave... and can some of those other sheep... those to whom Bp. Craig referred... attend a Jewish synagogue... or Muslim mosque... or Hindu temple... or a different place of worship... and be considered "Christian" based on how they act... can they... whoever they are... have something to teach us... next Saturday evening is our next Standing Together event... with our Muslim brothers and sisters... that might be a good next step...

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