

4 Easter Year C

5/8/2022

Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30

Rev. Mark A. Lafler

In our 23rd Psalm and in our Gospel reading we...

The people of God...

Are compared to...

Being sheep.

We are sheep precisely because we are followers of Jesus...

Disciples of Jesus...

Jesus is our shepherd.

In the psalm...

we the sheep...

are comforted and guided by the Shepherd.

He protects us and blesses us.

In the Gospel reading...

We the sheep hear the voice of our master and follow him.

Jesus said:

My sheep hear my voice.

I know them, and they follow me.

Jesus then says:

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.

No one will snatch them out of my hand.

Such wonderful and comforting words.

Great words to post on your bathroom mirror or refrigerator...

Great words to read each day...

A reminder of the great never-ceasing love that Jesus has for us.

No one will snatch [us] out of [His] hand.

We the people of God...

The Sheep of God...

Are called to hear Jesus' voice and to follow him.

And this is precisely what we see St. Peter doing in our narrative reading from the book of Acts...

our first reading today.

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven,

he gave these last words to Peter and all the disciples that were there

Jesus said:

*...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem,
and in all Judea and Samaria,
and to the ends of the earth.*

Peter heard the words of the Great Shepherd...

And he followed.

He stayed with the others in Jerusalem...

The Holy Spirit came down and empowered them at Pentecost.

Peter preached that first day...

The church was born...

And the disciples went around preaching the good news concerning
Jesus.

Peter preached the cross and resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem and
eventually begins to branch out across Judea.

He ends up in a place called Joppa...

A fairly unassuming town in the first century.

A coastal port-town...

33 miles east of Jerusalem.

Not too far from modern day Tel-Aviv.

And it was here that he came to the aid of a generous and pious woman named Tabitha.

Our reading gives both her Hebrew and Greek name...

Dorcas being the Greek.

Both names mean Gazelle and speak of beauty and grace.

Now Tabitha was known for her generosity.

Especially among the neediest people...

And in this culture, it would be the widows.

They were the bottom rung of society without anyone to represent them or protect them.

In a patriarchal society...

Being a widow could very well be a death sentence.

Harsh to think about as one was already dealing with grief and then poverty was ever looming on the horizon.

Tabitha was giving them hope and life.

Our reading tells us that she made them tunics and other clothing.

Perhaps for themselves...

Perhaps so that they could sell some of the goods and have money for food.

But now she... Tabitha... had died.

And with her death her ministry too.

The widows were distraught.

How would they be able to survive?

They called for St. Peter... hearing that he was in a near town.

And Peter came and through the power of God...

Tabitha was raised to life.

And our reading ends with a note that St. Peter stayed there for some time.

Most likely ministering to the small and growing church...

Which was in all probability comprised by widows.

It is wise to never underestimate the role the early church played in the empowering of women.

But that's for another talk.

Last week, we heard from the narrative of St. Paul's conversion...

Dan, our Director of Family Ministries, shared how Ananias played a major role in Paul's life...

God spoke to Ananias...

Telling him to meet with a murderer and to minister to him.

Remember what Jesus said:

My sheep hear my voice.

I know them, and they follow me.

Ananias followed what God said...

He brought healing to Paul...

And as Dan pointed out...

Ananias was just above a footnote in the story.

The Acts of the Apostles is full of these footnote people.

These helpers...

These faithful people who do their part.

Tabitha is another one...

Doing her part...

Making clothes for the widows.

Using her resources and talents to make a difference in a small port town of Joppa.

Faithfulness.

Not looking for the limelight or the recognition.

Outside of the people she helped...

probably no one paid attention to her.

I was reminded of a quote I heard recently by the fiction author
Leif Enger...

Who writes novels in his home state of Minnesota.

He said:

I think it's okay to be temporary...to be a short line in a long poem.

Something to chew on there.

A short line in a long poem.

That's not a call to settle for less...

It is a call to know your purpose.

It's not a proclamation to be mediocre or to not do your best.

It is a proclamation to do your best in the calling that you have.

Even though we might be a short line in a long poem...

We play a vital role.

A significant part.

Most of the time if you toss that short line out...

The whole poem feels different...

The poem is no longer whole.

It's missing something.

It's missing the part you play...

We are not called to just attend church.

We are called to be the church.

The church is made up of all sorts of people...

Different ideas...

Different perspectives...

Different talents...

Different occupation, vocations...

Different resources.

You begin to take just some of those away and the Church loses its wholeness...

Our catechism points to all of us...

Laity and ordained...

As ministers of Jesus Christ.

The catechism says:

The duty of all Christians is to follow Christ; to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God.

(BCP, 856)

The catechism instructs us saying that we are:

To bear witness to Jesus wherever we may be... according to the gifts given to us.

(BCP, 855)

We all have a role to play...

A part to do.

St. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth:

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.

For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?

But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

If they were all one part, where would the body be?

As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

(I Corinthians 12:12-14, 17-20)

Most of us will not be like Paul or Peter...

But we can be like Tabitha.

I am reminded of our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry who often likes to quote the traditional African American spiritual...

There is a Balm in Gilead

The hymn says:

If you can't pray like Peter

If you can't be like Paul

Go home and tell your neighbour

He died to save us all

There is a balm in Gilead

To make the wounded whole

There is a balm in Gilead

To heal the wounded soul

So as we consider the story of Tabitha...

As we consider the story of Ananias from last week.

As we here the stories of these small role characters from the book of Acts...

May we be reminded of the words of our Lord Jesus...

Who said:

My sheep hear my voice.

I know them, and they follow me.

Our lesson today...

Is a question...

What short line in this long poem do you play?

If you are not sure...

Come see me and let's talk about it.

Amen.