

Dear Friends,

Traditionally, the Fourth Sunday of Easter is always Good Shepherd Sunday from the Gospel of John 10:1-10. We can't forget that these words of Jesus, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (10:10), are his interpretation of the healing of the man blind from birth -- a man begging for his next meal, a man constantly exposed to the elements, a man without community, alone to fend for himself.

Abundant life according to Jesus' standards is just about the opposite of how abundant gets defined by contemporary criteria, which might include living with great blessings of family, wealth and health. However, abundant life according to Jesus is protection, provision, and presence with God. Sounds rather simple.

But without such an understanding of our existence in God, might the trials and losses in life be ever more insurmountable? Without a landscape around us of a loving community, how do we learn to love, and without the belief of an eternal relationship in God through Christ, how can we not feel completely alone when darkness falls upon us?

I do not mean this faith journey is without mystery and deep sink holes. But in the Risen Christ, holiness has touched human life and human suffering. And so, we can rethink and reorder our values and expectations. Just like the blind man given sight, in that healing experience with Jesus he was showered with new and abundant life. And, we too, can be.

In Christ,

Beverly+

PRAYER

O God, whose goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our life, you have made Jesus, whom you raised from the dead, the gate through which we, the sheep of your flock, may enter the sheepfold of abundant life. Pour forth upon us the gift of the Holy Spirit, so that amidst the corruption of this age and over the voices of those intent on leading us astray, we may learn to recognize the voice of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who came that we may have life, life in all its fullness. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

From Prayers for Sunday and Seasons, Year A, Peter J. Scagnelli, LTP, 1992.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER PATHWAYS

MAY 3, 2020

Lessons of the Day: Psalm 23; Acts 2:42-47; 1 Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10

THE KING OF LOVE MY SHEPHERD IS* - PSALM 23

The pastoral metaphor at the outset of Psalm 23 resonates so deeply with us because of texts like John 10:11 (*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*). The history of Christian art has played its part as well, reinforcing and developing this image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd through countless iterations. Having encountered all of these images of Jesus holding and caring for sheep, it's hard for us not to associate Jesus as the shepherd in v. 1.

Many of us can hear the first line of the Psalm in the King James Version (KJV): "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." And our blood pressure goes down. There are many ways that the Psalm's radical claims confront our experiences of suffering, fear, enmity, and alienation. In this Psalm, we hear the author's spiritual journey and can listen for our own.

This journey consists of the "paths of righteousness." These "paths of righteousness" are more like spiritual practices that we take up to order our spiritual lives and to help us in the times of trial and tribulation. Practices like daily private prayer, silence, walking, family sharing and prayer and acts of kindness. To get into such a pathway is to live in a way that promotes and sustains right relationships all around you, with the community and with God.

After the description the blessing that awaits the psalmist in the house of the Lord (v. 5), the text again depicts the psalmist in motion: "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life" (KJV). The word "follow" here (*radaph*) is better translated "pursue," a surprising verb given that it is usually the *enemies* that are pursuing the psalmist with an intent to overtake and destroy. Furthermore, in this same verse, the word "surely" is better translated "only." Thus, it's not the enemies in hot pursuit. Instead, "*only* goodness and mercy will be chasing me down."

As we try to live shining Christian lives, we get lost in uncertainty, fear and challenges like everyone else. Psalm 23 can be the balm of Gilead. At this particular time in our global pandemic, can you think a better image than God's Spirit of *goodness and mercy chasing us down?*"

As Christians who read and preach this text, we must consider Jesus not only as the good shepherd of John 10, but also as the trailblazer of the paths of righteousness. Jesus tends us and guides us into right relationships with each other and with God. In the psalm, the paths of righteousness do not lead directly from the green pastures to the house of the Lord. No, those righteous ruts go through the very darkest valley.

In Jesus's case, the paths of righteousness lead all the way to the cross. Jesus has shown us that way and calls us to follow him. The good news of Psalm 23 is that when we walk these paths of righteousness, we walk with God (v. 4).

Faithfully,

Beverly+

*Words: Henry Williams Baker (1821-1877); para. of Psalm 23.