

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS FOR APRIL 21, 2024

Acts 4:5-12

- Note how the beginning of our passage sets up an assembly of powers and authorities before Peter, questioning him about what authority he does his actions. Where does Peter find his authority? Where does he find his strength?
- Though it seems that the word for *saved* or *salvation* is used twice in this passage (in verse 12: “There is *salvation* in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be *saved*.”), it is used a third time when Peter introduces his response in verse 9: “if we ... are asked how this man has been *healed/saved*.” So, when Peter speaks of *salvation* he is talking about more than being saved from sin. Rather, *salvation* indicates a wholeness that comes not from an outside authority but an inward experience of resurrection and new life.

Psalm 23

- What does it mean to call God your shepherd? God as shepherd appeals to a people who know agriculture and farming in a rural setting. What are images that would work with us now?
- What would it mean to live by the words, “I shall not be in want”? How well do you live by these words?
- Reflect on the following verse: “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for you are with me.” When have you felt God’s presence in your darkest times?
- Often when we hear, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies,” we understand a gloating in front of enemies – rather disturbing if you think of it. But it may simply re-word God’s presence in the valley of the shadow of death, God providing for us even when we are surrounded by our enemies. Or it may suggest that our enemies are brought to the table with us, so that they are no longer enemies.

1 John 3:16-24

- Central to understanding this passage is this simple message: Love is not an abstract ideal. Love is only realized when it is done in concrete and specific action. Consider the following two verses in this regard:
 - “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another” – We are called to love one another as Jesus has loved us.
 - “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?” – This verse perhaps challenges all of us, as we tend to fall far short of its call.

John 10:11-18

- On the 4th Sunday of Easter we hear a different section from Jesus’ discourse about being the Good Shepherd in John 10. Last year Jesus said, “I am the gate.” This year we hear the familiar “I am the good shepherd.”
- The passages in John 10 about Jesus being the Good Shepherd follow the healing of a blind man in John 9, a man who is then rejected by the Temple leadership. Jesus as Good Shepherd is not simply an abstract, comforting idea. It is shown in his care for those cast aside by society and the Temple. The Temple leadership represents the “hired hands” of this passage. They have abandoned this lost sheep, this blind man. Jesus as shepherd is there to gather him/them in. When have we as a church run away and abandoned those whom we are called to gather in?
- Jesus says here, “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” Jesus reminds us that we are to look outside ourselves and see God’s goal of making one flock under one shepherd. How can you be a part of that task? How can Epiphany Lutheran be a part of that task?