

Easter 4



April 21

Prayer of the Day

God of all power, you called from death our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep. Send us as shepherds to rescue the lost, to heal the injured, and to feed one another with knowledge and understanding; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Or

Almighty God, you show the light of your truth to those in darkness, to lead them into the way of righteousness. Give strength to all who are joined in the family of the Church, so that they will resolutely reject what erodes their faith and firmly follow what faith requires; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Acts 2:42-47

{42} They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. {43} Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. {44} All who believed were together and had all things in common; {45} they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. {46} Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, {47} praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

42: "Four things are noted as characteristic of Jerusalem Christians: their adherence to 'the teaching of the apostles,' 'communal form of life,' 'the breaking of bread,' and 'prayers.' The 'teaching' of the apostles means more than the *kerygma*, 'the proclamation' about the death, resurrection, and significance of Christ. What the apostles taught was the basis for what the church of Luke's own day was still teaching. *Koinonia*, 'communal form of life,' is the first way that Luke names the Christian church in Acts.... 'The breaking of bread,' known from Luke 24:30, 35, is the abstract formulation that becomes the usual way Luke refers to the eucharistic celebration among early Christians. The 'prayers' may echo the phrase *te proseuche* (1:14), but being plural, it may mean their continuing to share in Temple prayers (see 2:46).... Luke has included this description of early Christian life as an ideal that he would desire to be characteristic of all Christians....it highlights the elements that should be part of genuine Christian life: harmony, reverent care for one another, formal and informal prayer in common, and celebration of the Lord's Supper." [1]

44. *had all things in common*: See Acts 4:32-37 for one way in which this was realized (and Acts 5:1-11 for an example of deceit with respect to the practice). In Acts 6 we also see some of the problems in the distribution of the common holdings. "Luke does not present this way of life as a norm for the organization of the church in his own time. It is meant as an illustration of the uniqueness of the ideal earliest days of the movement." [2]

45. *they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need*: The Jerusalem church was so poor that Paul was admonished by the Jerusalem authorities to *remember the poor* (Galatians 2:10). He took up a collection for the church in Jerusalem among his Gentile congregations (1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Romans 15:25-29 and brought it to Jerusalem (Acts 24:17).

46. *they spent much time together in the temple*: We are reminded that the Christians in Jerusalem were Christian Jews. They continued to practice their religion as they always had, with the

conviction that Jesus was the Messiah whom God had promised. At this time they were accepted by the general population. Soon the people of Jerusalem rejected them (Acts 7:51-52).

47. *the Lord added to their number*: Other notices of growth: 2:41; 4:4; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 19:20.

Psalms 23

{1} The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. {2} He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; {3} he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. {4} Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff-- they comfort me. {5} You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. {6} Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

1. *The Lord is my shepherd*: The prophets (Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 23:1-6; Ezekiel 34) use the image of Yahweh as the shepherd of his people.

2-4: The singer uses the imagery of the shepherd's care for his/her flock to describe Yahweh's care for his flock.

5. The singer describes his acceptance in the Temple, where he is fed with heavenly food and drink, and anointed with holy oil.

6. Yahweh's care and protection will continue throughout the life of the singer. (S)he will dwell in the Temple.

For further exegesis please see the study for Lent 4 in year A.

1 Peter 2:19-25

{19} For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. {20} If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. {21} For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. {22} "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." {23} When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. {24} He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. {25} For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

19-20: These verses deal with the behavior of Christian slaves when they are mistreated by abusive masters. "The author's judgment does not pertain to all labor conflicts, nor does he express his views on socio-economic problems in general. He deals only with the question as to whether the Christian workers should react to persecution with violence.... The author warns against such behavior for the sake of the gospel and salvation." [3]

22. *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."*: Isaiah 53:9. "Many detect an early Christian hymn here [verses 21-25]; others see simply an interpretation of Isa 53." [4]

25. *you have returned to the...guardian of your souls*: Guardian = *episkopos*. Later the word became "bishop," the overseer of a local church.

John 10:1-10

{1} "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. {2} The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. {3} The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. {4} When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. {5} They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." {6} Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. {7} So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. {8} All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. {9} I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. {10} The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

The tenth chapter of John is distributed over the three years of the lectionary: 10:1-10 in year A, 11-18 in year B, and 22-30 in year C.

1. Chapter 10 continues in the same context as chapter 9. Jesus has indicted the Pharisees as sinners. Now he characterizes them as thieves and bandits.

very truly: The phrase is used 25 times in John's Gospel. "The formula means something like, 'I

give you my word of honor.' In effect it is an oath, explicitly and publicly giving one's word of honor concerning the veracity of what one is saying.... In Mediterranean societies putting one's honor on the line in public is a very serious matter.... Jesus' frequent word of honor assures his audience that he intends to speak the truth." [5]

a thief and a bandit [robber]: "A *thief* in Jewish law is a fellow member of society liable to make restitution.... A robber is a stranger, perhaps an outlaw." [6] Judas was a thief (12:6); Barabbas was a bandit (Mark 15:7). Malina and Rohrbaugh discuss social banditry, "a phenomenon that is nearly universal in agrarian societies.... Persons driven off the land by debt or violence or social chaos of any sort resort to brigandage in which the elite are the primary victims." In their view Barabbas is such a social bandit. [7]

2. *the shepherd of the sheep:* "God is frequently said to be the shepherd of his people (Pss. 23:1; 80:2; Isa. 40:11; Jer. 31:9), and God's people are likened to sheep (Pss. 74:1; 79:13; 95:7; 100:3). David, or a Davidic Messiah, is likewise spoken of as a shepherd (Ps. 78:70-72; Ezek. 37:24; Mic. 5:3). Occasionally there is comment about faithless shepherds who injure the flock (Jer. 2:8; 10:20; 12:10; Ezek. 34; Zech. 11:4-9)." [8] In Jesus' day shepherds were...presumed to be dishonorable men. [9]

6. *this figure of speech: paroimian* is a translation of the Hebrew *mashal*; it is a riddle, an obscure saying, a figure of speech. John 16:25: "The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but will tell you plainly of the Father. *In figures* is contrasted with plainly." *In figures* "must therefore mean some kind of veiled or symbolic utterance." [10]

they did not understand what he was saying to them: Jesus told them in different words the same thing in verses 7-10 as he had told them in verses 1-5. Only those who come to the flock (the Johannine believers) through Jesus (the gate) are able to enter and become proper leaders (shepherds).

7. *I am the gate of the sheep:* Also verse 8, "I am the gate." "If John's antisociety forms a flock, then Jesus himself is the only access to John's group. Initiation and entry to John's group happens only by means of Jesus himself. Jesus emphatically holds the exclusive role as group executive. He is not only social gatekeeper, but the gate itself. There is no other way into the group.... Other group leaders are viewed by John as thieves and bandits." [11]

There are seven "I am" statements in John: 6:35, the bread of life; 8:12, 12:46, the light of the world; 10:7, 9, the gate of the sheep; 10:11, 14, the good shepherd; 11:25, the resurrection and the life; 14:6, the way, the truth, and the life; 15:1, 5, the true vine; 10:30.

10. *I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly:* Jesus identifies his mission in terms of life. As God first created human beings by breathing into them the breath of life, so Jesus has come to re-animate those who believe in him and give them new and abundant life.

Reflection

"The petitioner [in Psalm 23] has enemies (v. 5), his life is threatened and persecuted. But in the temple, the community of Yahweh [*tov wehesed*, goodness and mercy] has met the one persecuted. Now he knows that he is sheltered in the protective power of the [*shem*, name]. In his song of trust the singer at first takes hold of the image of Yahweh as the shepherd of his people (Ps. 80:1)...and he applies it to his own life.... In v. 5 the picture changes. As host, Yahweh demonstrates his protective power (v. 5a) in the fellowship of the meal (at a sacrifice?) over against the enemies.... The petitioner knows that his life is always sheltered and surrounded by well-being.... In the New Testament's message of fulfillment, Jesus Christ is [*ho poimen ho kalos*, the Good Shepherd] (John 10:11ff)." [12]

The idea that suffering has value is difficult to accept in spite of the value of Jesus' suffering for us. We see innocent suffering as victimization rather than as an expression of power in the imitation of Christ, and the acceptance of it as cowardice. The contrast between being beaten for doing wrong and being punished for doing right is clear. So is the statement that those who suffer unjustly have God's approval. What is difficult is the acceptance of undeserved suffering as an act of positive will to achieve a desired end. See Jesus' statement in John 10:17-18: "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it

up again. I have received this command from my Father."

Jesus is the "gate," the point of access to God's flock. He says the same thing using a different metaphor in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Hymns [13]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

174 E--For All the
79 D--To Jordan Came
738s D--Now Let Us
178 D--By All Your (v.13)
382 I--Awake, O Spirit

278 P--All Praise to
461 II--Fight the Good Fight
647v G--When Jesus Came
176, 70, 373, 689v, 691v

Prayers of the People [14]

P or A: We are God's people, the flock of God's pasture. For guidance and help in every need of our own and our neighbor, let us pray to God saying, "hear our prayer," and responding, "Good Shepherd be with us."

A: That all who lead and serve your people may have the heart of a true shepherd, seeing their calling as that of Christ, to share life abundantly. Hear our prayer, Good Shepherd be with us.

A: That the leaders of the nations, especially of our nation, and our provincial and local leaders may be filled with a shepherding spirit and not see citizens under their jurisdiction as those to be sheared and profited from, but as those to be honestly governed, nourished and protected. Hear our prayer, Good Shepherd be with us.

A: That refugees and exiles may know the joy of being brought home, that the sick know the strength of your arms lifting and supporting them, especially we remember _____, that those who pass through the valley of the shadow of death may see in you the gate to eternal life. Hear our prayer, Good Shepherd be with us.

A: Intensify our devotion to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. May our relationship with other Christians, especially our sisters and brothers in the Anglican Church of Canada enrich the devotion and mission of Christ's whole church. Hear our prayer, Good Shepherd be with us.

P: We give thanks for all that have been members of your flock before us and have passed on the Shepherd's guidance in right pathways. May we all enjoy the fragrance and pleasantness of green pastures and still waters under your care and reign. Hear our prayers for the sake and in the name of Jesus, our Shepherd. Amen.

Or [15]

Presider or deacon

Gathered in the care of the good shepherd and guardian of our souls, let us pray to God who knows our every need.

Deacon or other leader

For the holy churches in every place, and for the unity of all.

For this holy assembly and for all who gather in faith, hope, and love.

For NN and all illumined by the light of Christ.

For N our bishop and the presbyters, the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

For the world and its leaders, our nation and its people.

For all those in danger and need, the sick and the suffering, the strayed and the lost.

For those who walk in death's dark valley.

For ourselves, our families, and those we love.

Remembering the blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, who soothes our head with oil and fills our cup with wine.
Hear the prayers we offer for every need, and revive us with your Holy Spirit. Glory to you for
ever and ever.

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Notes

- [1] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1998, p.269.
- [2] Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987, p. 24.
- [3] Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude: Introduction, Translation and Notes*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964, p. 98.
- [4] *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books* (ed. by Wayne A. Meeks, et al). HarperCollins Publishers, 1992, pp. 2281-2282, note on 2.21-25.
- [5] Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998, p. 57.
- [6] J. Duncan M. Derrett, "The Good Shepherd: St. John's Use of Jewish Halakah and Haggadah," *Studia Theologica* 27(1973)47.
- [7] Malina & Rohrbaugh, *Ibid.*, pp. 262-263.
- [8] *Ibid.*, p. 179.
- [9] *Loc. cit.*
- [10] C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*. London: S.P.C.K., 1962, p. 307.
- [11] Malina & Rohrbaugh, *Ibid.*, p. 180.
- [12] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, p. 309.
- [13] <http://www.worship.ca/text/rcla0102.txt>
- [14] http://www.worship.ca/text/inter_a2.txt
- [15] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>