

# Easter 4



## 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 9:36-43

{36} Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. {37} At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. {38} Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, "Please come to us without delay." {39} So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. {40} Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. {41} He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. {42} This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. {43} Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

36. *Joppa*: Joppa was a city on the Mediterranean coast of Palestine, in the plain of Sharon, about 30 miles south of Caesarea Martima. Peter's activity here is in a Jewish community.

*a disciple...Tabitha...Dorcas*: An Aramaic name meaning "Gazelle." Dorcas in Greek means the same. Tabitha was a Christian Jew.

38. Lydda was near Joppa: Peter healed Aeneas in Lydda, northwest of Jerusalem on the road to Joppa, who was paralyzed for eight years (Acts 9:32-34), so when Tabitha died he was sent for.

*the disciples*: There was a Christian community of Jews in Lydda. "The saints that lived in Lydda may have been, like Mnason, xxi. 16, original disciples of Jesus; we must not be blinded by Acts to imagine that all Christ's followers reached Lydda, Damascus or elsewhere from Jerusalem, or as a result of missions from Jerusalem alone." [1]

40. *Peter put all of them outside*: Elijah (1 Kings 17:19 ff.), Elisha (2 Kings 4:33) and Jesus (Mark 5:40) also perform their resurrections or resuscitations in privacy.

*he...said, "Tabitha, get up."*: Jesus also performs a resuscitation by a spoken command, "Talitha cum" (Mark 5:41; Luke 8:54). Compare with the words spoken by Jesus when he raised Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:41).

42. *This became known...and many believed in the Lord*: The implication seems to be

that seeing or even hearing about a resurrection inspired faith in unbelievers. However, Jesus said, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). Those who sent for Peter already believed. The purpose of a resurrection (even the resurrection of Jesus) was not to create faith, but to demonstrate to believers the authority of God over the power of death.

43. *Simon, a tanner*: Simon's trade was despised by many because of the smells associated with it. Peter stayed with Simon in Joppa until the centurion, Cornelius from Caesarea Martima, sent for Peter there (Acts 10:6, 32).

## Psalm 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 image of Yahweh as the shepherd of Israel is common in the Old Testament beginning with Genesis 49:24. (See also Psalm 79:13; Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:15ff. In the ancient Near East the king is often characterized as a shepherd. The imagery of shepherd and sheep dominates the song: green pastures, still waters, rod and staff, but other images are also used: he restores my soul, you prepare a table, my enemies, you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows, goodness and mercy shall follow me.

2-3. The very careful poetic structure of the Psalm is based on parallelism between the lines of the poem and the relationship of metaphor to declaration. The meaning of the parallels is made explicit in the last line.

*He makes me lie down     in     green  
pastures  
He leads me                     beside   still waters  
He restores my soul  
He leads me                     in     right paths  
   for his name's sake*

4-5. *I fear no evil;             for you are with me  
   your rod and your staff—they comfort me  
   You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies  
   you anoint my head with oil  
   my cup overflows.*

4. *the darkest valley*: In the Gospel Jesus says he is the light of the world. As that light he enlightens even the darkest valleys.

5. *you anoint my head with oil*: See the notes on 1 Samuel 16. The singer is an anointed person; the king?

6. *I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long*: The Temple in Jerusalem was the royal sanctuary, it was the King's temple. The people had access to it only by sufferance.

"The background of the psalm of trust represents a definite danger. The petitioner has enemies, his life is threatened and persecuted. But in the Temple, in the community of Yahweh, [*tov vehesed*: "goodness and mercy"] has met the one persecuted. Now he

knows that he is sheltered in the protective power of the [*shem*, "name"].... the petitioner knows that his life is always sheltered and surrounded by well-being." [2]

### Revelation 7:9-17

{9} After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. {10} They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" {11} And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, {12} singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." {13} Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" {14} I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. {15} For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. {16} They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; {17} for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Revelation 7:4 says that 144,000 were sealed "out of every tribe of the people of Israel." It is possible that this is based on a first century estimate of the number of Christian Jews in the first part of the second century, or they may be identical with the 144,000 of Revelation 14:1 who represent the entire church.

*9. a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages:* The uncountable multitude which is the church stands before God's throne in heaven

*Lamb:* "The image of Jesus as a *Lamb* who has been *slaughtered* is a surprising contrast to his designation as a lion (5.5) and suggests the Passover sacrifice (1 Cor 5.7). Revelation uses Lamb as a designation for the exalted Christ twenty-eight times, highlighting his sacrificial role...." [3]

*robed in white:* In verse 14 they are identified as those "who have come out of the great ordeal," originally a specific, historical event, now transformed into an eschatological tribulation prior to God's triumph.

*10. They cried with a loud voice:* They shout their acclamation to God and to the Lamb.

*11-12:* The angels (and the elders and four living creatures) prostrate themselves and sing a doxology to God as they sang praise to the Lamb in 5:12.

*13-14:* A dialogue between an elder and the seer explaining who those robed in white are. Only here and in 17:7-18 is an explanation of an element of the visions of the seer provided. There is a similar scene in Ezekiel 37:3-4, where Yahweh asks Ezekiel if the dead bones can live, and Ezekiel replies, "O Lord God, you know."

*15-17:* Those who have come through the great tribulation will no longer suffer hunger or thirst (reminiscent of Matthew 25:35), or the scorching blast of the sun.

*17. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes:* See Isaiah 25:8 (first lesson for Proper 23): "the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces."

This is a vision of God's throne room in the heavenly temple, in the *first* heaven (cf. Revelation 21:1). At the judgment the first heaven and the first earth will be replaced, and both earth and heaven will be new, and different.

### John 10:22-30

{22} At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, {23} and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. {24} So the Jews gathered around

him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." {25} Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; {26} but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. {27} My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. {28} I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. {29} What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. {30} The Father and I are one."

*22. the festival of the Dedication:* The festival of Hanukkah celebrated the rededication of the Temple by Judas Maccabeus in 165 b.c.e. after it had been profaned by Antiochus Epiphanes (1 Maccabees 4:41-61). It took place on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Chislev (November-December) and lasted eight days. It was marked with the lighting of lamps and feasting. In John 2:19 Jesus is reported to have said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." In verse 21 it is noted that "he was speaking of the temple of his body."

*the portico of Solomon:* A colonnaded walkway on the east side of the Temple walls.

*24-25. "How long will you keep us in suspense?":* "A literal translation would be , 'How long do you take our life from us?' ... In modern Greek...the phrase is an idiom meaning 'provoke us.' It should be noted that questions posed in public are always an honor challenge." [4]

*26. you do not belong to my sheep:* Jesus refuses to respond directly. Instead he points to his works, and asserts that the questioners do not believe because they are not a part of his flock.

*27. My sheep hear my voice:* The good shepherd calls his sheep and they know his voice; they "do not know the voice of strangers" (John 10:3-5).

*28-29. No one will snatch them out of my hand.... No one can snatch it out of the Father's hand:* "It" is what the Father has given Jesus, that his, his sheep. No one can snatch them from the Father's or Jesus' hand.

*30. The Father and I are one:* "Jesus and the Father are not a single person...but one, so that Jesus does just what God does...." [5] "...the Greek clearly says that Jesus and the Father are one 'thing,' not one 'person'; cf. 14:28. In 17:11 Jesus prays that his followers may be 'one' just as he and the Father are 'one.' In both instances he is speaking of the close, interpersonal relationship of loyalty and trust that John consistently claim exists between himself, God, and his followers." [6]

## Reflection

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is the focus of our attention on the fourth Sunday of Easter all three years. In the Gospel we are reminded that Jesus does not respond to demands, even for simple answers to question. Instead, he invites us to draw our conclusions on the basis of his actions (and for us, perhaps the actions of those who call him Lord). Those who believe in Jesus and belong to his sheep are safe; no one will be able to snatch them from him. Eternal life is theirs. Jesus' sheep include those who are not already in the fold.

The story in the first lesson of the resurrection or resuscitation of Tabitha demonstrates that the resurrection of Jesus was available to believers. "...Jesus, not Peter, is the source of the miraculous power expended on Aeneas. It is the power of God's Son that heals and vivifies, for he has already been proclaimed as 'the author of life' (3:15)." [7]

The expansion of the early church began with two of the seven deacons selected in Acts 6; Stephen and his ministry to the Hellenists (Jews), and Phillip and the conversion of the Ethiopian and the ministry to the Samaritans (both groups had Jewish associations). Saul and his conversion, his witness to Jews and his dispute with

the Hellenists forms a watershed in the growth of the church. Soon Paul will begin his mission to the Gentiles, but before he does we return to Peter and his contacts with Christian Jews in Joppa and Lydda, and the conversion of Cornelius, a Gentile. Although the story of the conversion of Cornelius, the centurion (10:1-48) is not used this year, the first lesson next week (Acts 11:1-18), deals with the acceptance of the first Gentile converts into the church.

Psalm 23 is appointed for this Sunday (Good Shepherd Sunday), all three years of the lectionary. The psalmist is confident of the power of Yahweh to preserve and protect him/her and to surround him/her with goodness and mercy.

It was dangerous to be a Christian at the end of the first century of the common era. Both Christian Jews and Gentile Christians were in jeopardy throughout the empire. In this passage John records his vision of those who perished in persecution. God will provide for them and wipe their tears, the Lamb will guide them to the water of life. The church was strengthened by words like these and survived the hostility of the pagan Roman empire.

### **Hymns [8]**

*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

363 --E--Christ is Alive!  
456 --D--The King of  
179 --I--At the Name  
451 --P--The Lord's My  
175 --II--Ye Watchers  
and Ye

314 --II--Who Is This  
643v --II--Once in Royal  
(730s)  
690v --II--Shall We Gather  
711v --G--You Satisfy (774s)  
702s, 516, 755s, 838s

### **Prayers of the People [9]**

P or A: Called through the waters of baptism to be children of God in Christ's new creation, we joyfully pray "Christ is risen!" and respond "Christ is risen indeed!"

A: Heavenly Father, through the death and resurrection of your Son and by the power of your Spirit, you have invited people of every race and background to be one. Let your church be a community of believers undivided by the variety of appearances and experiences with which we have been blessed. Christ is risen! Christ...

A: God of creation, you have made a world of beauty and mystery and have called human beings to be its stewards. Encourage us to care for your world and abandon wasteful and destructive ways, so that we and all creation might praise your name. Christ is risen! Christ...

A: God of new life, we look to the life of the world to come with hope-- where tears are wiped away and death is no more. Teach us to share this hope with others in a way that reflects your grace and love. Christ is risen! Christ...

A: God of the sick and the dying, we pray that you comfort all who suffer from illness. We pray especially for \_\_\_\_\_. Christ is risen! Christ...

A: God of love, your Son commanded us to love one another as he loved us. May this congregation be known for its love, both among its members, and as it is shown to others. Christ is risen! Christ...

P: Into your hands we commend all for which we pray, trusting your promise to hear our prayers. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*Presider or deacon*

Gathered before the throne of the Lamb, let us pray for the needs of the flock of God throughout the world.

*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 the name of the risen Christ.

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 our most glorious and blessed Virgin Mary, *N*, 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, God our Father, who raised your Son from the dead. Hear the prayers we offer for every need, and make us one through your Holy Spirit. Glory to you for ever and ever.

## Notes

[1] C.S.C. Williams, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957, p. 128.

[2] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, p. 309.

[3] *The HarperCollins Study Bible*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1993, note to verse 6, page 2316.

[4] Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998, pp. 184-185.

[5] Ernst Haenchen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 7-21*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, p. 50.

[6] Malina, *Ibid.*, p. 187.

[7] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1998, p. 443.

[8] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rc1c0001.txt>

[9] [http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter\\_c.txt](http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_c.txt)

[10] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>