

Easter 4—Year B

Acts 4:5-12

Psalm 23

1 John 3:16-24

John 10:11-18

Easter 4. Good Shepherd Sunday. I never get tired of coming to *this* Sunday. *After* Holy Week and the empty tomb, *after* the confusion that resurrection brings, *after* disbelief and returning joy, *after* grief as deep as your bones and doubt and hope and the sense that your world has been turned upside down and you have lost all points of orientation, *after all of that*, we always come to *this* Sunday, and these *texts* and *hymns* and *psalm 23* that we know by heart, and *they* wash over us like the balm that they are.

When we are in *struggle* and *feeling lost*, are there any more *comforting* words to hear than **“The Lord is my shepherd?”**

When we are *tired* and *weary*, is there any *better* place to *rest* than **“green pastures?”**

When *life is chaos* and the *world is spinning*, don’t we *long* for the **“still waters”** than can bring us back to *center*?

When the *spark of life is hard to find*, don’t we find *hope* in the One who can **“revive our soul?”**

When we *can’t even conceive of the next right thing to do*, there is *comfort* in knowing there is One who **“will guide us along right pathways.”**

And when **“the valley of the shadow of death rises up,”** and it will, and we know there is *no way through but through it*, to know that we **“need not fear”** the darkness, we **“need not fear any evil,”** we **“need not fear”** those *forces that seek to throw us apart from our deepest selves*, for **“the Lord who is my shepherd is with us, his rod and his staff, they comfort us”**—**this gives us the strength to keep putting one foot in front of the other.**

And **“amidst those who would trouble us,”** our **“enemies”** in the much superior language of the *King James*, amidst all those who *sow seeds of dissension and division*, **“amidst those who would trouble us,”** we *stand perfectly still* knowing that **“a bigger table is set, full of plenty, and the oil flows and our cups run over.”**

When **“goodness”** is hard to taste and **“mercy”** is in short supply, to know that **“goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life,”** even if we can’t see them in front of us; when *home* is a *distant memory*, to know that **“our dwelling place in the house of the Lord”** is *never* in doubt, to know that *God is always guiding us back home*, **“for ever” and always—THIS IS EVERYTHING.**

And, as **Acts 4** makes clear, those that cling to *power* and *position* and to their *own capacity* to make things happen, *they will never understand this*. Those who want to *validate* and *authenticate* sources of power, so that they can *maintain control*, *they will never understand* the

scripture that **Peter** quotes when he describes **Jesus'** power to heal, "**This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, it has become the cornerstone.'** There is *salvation in no one else.*"

Could we just meditate on that for a good long while? That which is **rejected** and **broken**, that which is deemed **unworthy** and **unfit** by the **builders**, *in Jesus*, that very **broken stone becomes the stone on which the whole building depends. That is the very definition of *redemption.***

Our **broken places** aren't **stones** to be cast aside, but they are **integral to building our wholeness.** "**There is salvation in no one else**"—there is *no way to wholeness without loving the brokenness*, and in so doing, **redeeming** it. That is the very definition of *compassion.*

This is **who Jesus is**; this is **what Jesus does**—*nobody else* dares to stand before us in **resurrection life with palms open**, *daring to show us their wounds, instead of hiding them; no one else dares to show us that glory is revealed just as much* in the places where **life has pierced us and cut us to the quick**, as that **glory that shines on the mountaintop**; *no one else takes our brokenness into their body and shows us how we might yet live. That is the kind of wholeness we long for, and that is the very definition of salvation.*

The **wolf will come and try to snatch away** that which is most precious to us, and when that happens, **the hireling won't be enough** because **the hireling functions purely on a transactional basis**, and if it doesn't suit the **hireling's interests**, well, they just won't stick around. No, when the **wolf** comes, **you want the good shepherd who knows you by name in that most intimate of ways that defies words.** It's the **knowing and being known** that you can **only know** with your **heart** and your **soul**, *and this knowing will not fail you.*

As **sheep**, we **don't always see the wolf coming**; it can *catch us by surprise*, but the **good shepherd is ever vigilant**, and the **wolf doesn't stand a chance** when **confronted by the One** who **knows the power of laying down one's life and power of taking that life back up again.** Again, *this cannot be explained, only experienced and lived*, but **once you know sheer and utter surrender AND the life that comes on the other side, then you know the power of this power.**

The **chaos** will come, the **waters** will swirl, **the valley of the shadow of death** is out there, and so is the **wolf**, **but the Lord is our shepherd, and he's a good one.** He knows us *each by name*, and he will *never, ever* let us go. Amen.

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