

Fourth Sunday of Easter 2017

7 May 2017

[Acts 2: 42-47, Psalm 23, 1 Peter 2: 1-10 and John 10: 1-10](#)

Vanderbilt

[Easter 4 A May 7 2017](#) Textweek

When I came here to visit a couple of months ago, I was really impressed with how Peter managed to link all the readings together. This is something that I try to do, but is generally one of those things that is “easier said than done”, but I’ll give it a go. In one of those rare flukes, it’s rather easy to sum up what all our Bible readings today are talking about: they are talking about how we should be living, or the ideal life.

Our reading from Acts tells us of the first disciples and one of the first Christian communities. People all worked together for the betterment of everyone, and to make sure that no-one lost out. We have that wonderful verse where it says,

“all who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and good and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

And goes on to talk about how they broke bread together, praised God together and how their numbers kept growing.

No doubt you had heard a number of sermons about how this should be our ideal life and how we should be living.

Psalm 23 talks about living in faith even through difficult times: walking through the valley of the shadow of death. We all walk through that valley every day, but for some of us the shadow is rather darker and more real than it is for others. The psalm does remind us that goodness and mercy will be with us each day and we shall live in the house of the Lord forever.

Our reading from 1 Peter is urging us to live good, clean lives, reminding us that God’s word should be a foundation stone in our lives and as easy for us to digest as milk is for a baby. It reminds

us that we are part of the chosen race of God, his chosen people, each one of us a royal priest in the holy nation of God. We no longer walk in darkness, but instead walk in the marvellous light of God.

Our reading from the Gospel of John is one of the great "I am" statements of Jesus. Jesus says, "I am the gate for the sheep" – all who enter through the saving love of Jesus Christ will be saved. We also have the wonderful verse, "I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly".

The message of living our lives how God wants them to be lived, or trying to keep to God's ideal plan for each of our lives is wonderful. It is. But what happens if our lives, through very little fault of our own, veer off this path and all of a sudden we find ourselves somewhere we never dreamed we would find ourselves, and never wanted to be in the first place? What then? It's all well and good to continue to try and live our lives the way God wants us to, but what happens if we suddenly find ourselves in the middle of a metaphorical car crash? Something has happened and we don't want this "thing" in our lives, but we have to live with it anyway.

For some of us, it could be a relationship breakdown. For some of us it could be the serious illness or death of a family member or loved one. For some of us it might be something that comes completely out of left field that we never even had on our radars. I'm mixing my metaphors, but you know what I mean. What then? Our readings also give us the answer to this. From Acts we know that we are to go to our fellow Christians and receive help from them. I don't know about you, but I'm very happy to **give** help to others, but I'm really not great at **receiving** help from others. But this is part of what the Christian life is all about.

From our Psalm we know that we continue to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Or, to paraphrase Winston Churchill, when you're going through hell, keep going. As our Christian theology tells us, God is beside us through everything, and He loves to help us with what we are going through. If you're going through a rough or a bad time, keep going, and keep asking him for help. Again, like many of you, I'm very good at praying for others, but not so great at praying for myself. My challenge to you is to ask you

to pray for yourself. By all means say Thank you, and ask for help and intercede for others first. But then, without drama or embarrassment, ask for what you want or feel you need. And then give God the opportunity to walk beside you in your journey through that valley.

The letter from Peter reminds us that we are the chosen people of God. And this should hopefully remind us of that wonderful verse from Romans 8 which says, "if God is for us, then who can be against us?". Sometimes it might seem as if the entire world is against us, but if we believe that we are acting in a way that promotes the Kingdom of God **which is love** then God is for us. This doesn't mean that we can hurt others, but it should give us confidence when our own lives are hurting.

And this is echoed in the reading from John: Jesus is the Gate to the Sheepfold. If we are truly one of his sheep, and we recognise His voice and belong to him, then he will lay down his life—indeed he already **has**—in order to protect us. This is what a good shepherd does. Sheepfolds, apparently, didn't or don't have doors, and at night the shepherd would lay down across the entry to stop the sheep from getting out or anything else from getting in. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

All of these things take time, but you know what? So does the creation of anything good. What each of us needs to do is to decide for ourselves that yes, this is the kind of life you want to lead: one where you help others and aren't afraid to ask for help when you need it. This will then spiral out from each of our communities and encourage and attract others, and this, in turn, will encourage and attract even more others. This is truly living out the Good News of Jesus Christ. And this is what the world so desperately needs. So. Go out and live abundantly. Live your life like you know, deep in your heart, that God loves you. Take those risks, try those new things, ask for that help and be vulnerable with others. Then you will **know** God's presence beside you as you walk your journey and as you live your abundant life.

Amen.

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