

## 4 EASTER GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY MAY 15, 2011

TITLE:     **JESUS IS THE DOOR TO ETERNAL LIFE**

READINGS:   **Acts 2:42-47, Ps.23, 1Pet. 2:19-25, John 10:1-10**

Today on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the feast of Easter we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday a very special Sunday of the church year. We must remember that everything either leads us toward Easter or flows from this central truth of our faith. It is every Sunday of the year that we celebrate Jesus risen from the dead. Paul puts it very vividly when he says in 1Cor.15:17, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” And so the church wants us to see the nature and function of the apostolic church as we progress toward the celebration of our Lord’s ascension into heaven which is celebrated 40 days after Easter (this year on Thursday, June 2) and then the Easter Season culminates in the great feast of Pentecost, 50 days after Easter (from the Greek *Pentekostos* “fiftieth” – this year on Sunday June 12).

So why then these particular readings today? We are given these readings to help us see the growth of our infant church founded upon the teachings of the apostles, which is the celebration of the *Kerygma* – the Good News of the gospels. It reaches its high point today in the focus on Jesus as our shepherd and gate or door to eternal life, seen in today’s Gospel. The first lesson from Acts is a conclusion by Luke. He is showing what is happening as the first Christian community grows. This section is the conclusion of Peter’s great Pentecostal sermon. Just last Sunday we saw that Peter, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, opened the doors of the upper room and preached his great sermon to thousands gathered in Jerusalem. When they asked him what they should do, he said, “Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” Acts 2:38, and we see that over 3000 were baptized. So in today’s verses, Luke makes it clear to us how the early church grew in unity, fellowship, worship and prayer. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” Acts 2:42. It is still essential that we today remind ourselves that we are an apostolic church. We continue to teach the *Kerygma*, the Good News of the Gospel handed down to us by the apostles. In our Nicene creed we profess our faith by saying, “We believe in one, holy, catholic and **apostolic** church” not in Mr. Smith’s church or Pastor Jones’ church, not in some faith with a clever twist or one that simply makes us feel good

emotionally, but in the church which proclaims the truth of the Gospel handed on to us by the apostles.

Our second lesson today seems to be a little disjointed. You wonder just how it fits in with the other readings. It reminds me of the man who went to visit his friend, Herman, who was a farmer. As Jim drove onto Herman's farm he saw a three-legged pig. How strange, he thought, he had never seen a three-legged pig before. After greeting each other, Jim asked about the pig. "Oh," said Herman, "that's a very special pig. He saved my life two times." "Wow," Said Jim, "how did he do that?" "Well, once I had jacked up my tractor to repair it and when I got ready to crawl under it, I don't know how he knew, but that pig got in my way and wouldn't let me crawl under it. I went to get a 2x4 to crack him over the head, and just as I came back, crash! Down came that tractor. It would have smashed me right under it, for sure! Another time, I was out in my little boat on the pond, trying to clear some debris when I fell in. I don't know how that pig knew I couldn't swim, but out he came, grabbed me by the nap of the neck, and pulled me to shore." "Boy," said Jim, "that is some special pig. How did he come to have only three legs?" "Well," said Herman, "you don't want to eat a special pig like that all at once."

Like the three-legged pig, you wonder how this second reading fits in. Actually it should start back one verse. Did you know Peter is talking to slaves? And not just slaves, but domestic slaves (*oiketai* not *douloi*). He is exhorting those who are Christian slaves not to suffer just as slaves are supposed to, but to imitate our model in suffering who is Jesus Christ, and to lift whatever sufferings they must bear to a higher Christological plain. "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." 1Pet.2:21. And then he ends this particular passage with our connection to today's Good Shepherd Sunday, "For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls." 1Pet.2:25. The Psalm for today which we should pray often is the Good Shepherd Psalm. If there is any Psalm we should memorize it most certainly should be Psalm 23.

Our Gospel brings this Sunday into focus. We have been reminded that our infant church, built firmly on the Kerygma, the Good News of the Gospel, thrived and grew with the teaching of the apostles. Then Peter giving us the highest ideals upon which our faith stands, Jesus, who is the shepherd and guardian of our souls, and now we look to John who teaches us that it is this same Jesus who is our true shepherd and door to eternal life. Actually we should begin not with this small

section from John for today, but go back to chapter 9 verse 1. Why? Because our reading today is the conclusion of the story of the man born blind. Remember that story? A man was born blind. Jesus spat on the ground, made mud, put it on the man's eyes and told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. The man received his sight, his neighbors asked him about it, and the Pharisees put him through the third degree. They belittled him, condemned him, put him down. Then he went back to Jesus, who asked him for a profession of faith, which he gladly gave and then he received not only physical but spiritual sight. So what is John saying? His point is that everyone who puts faith in Jesus receives spiritual healing. "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Jn.10:10. John is telling us that some respond positively to Jesus, just like the man born blind, and others do not, just like the Pharisees. For, as John says, they do not know the shepherd's voice. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who is the gate through which we enter into the heavenly Kingdom.

We stand on very firm ground here in our faith and in our church founded on the Good News of the Gospel handed down to us by the apostles. Humbly acknowledge Jesus as your Lord, your Good Shepherd, your way to the Father and listen to his voice. **Amen.**

**Pastor Barney**