

Men's In-Person Bible Study – Wednesday, April 21, 2021 (11am) – Easter IV

TEXT: Acts 4:1-12 — Peter & John before the Council

1. Acts 3 ... Peter and John are going up to the Temple to pray. It's the ninth hour (3 p.m.). At the Gate called Beautiful, a nameless man, lame since birth, is healed. The healed man clings to Peter and John. The healing gives opportunity for bearing witness (testimony). **First a disclaimer:** "We didn't do this. Not our piety or power". Then **credit is given to whom credit is due:** "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who raised Jesus from the dead, is the source of this healing". **Indictment:** "You handed Jesus over to be crucified. You denied the Holy and Righteous One. You killed the author of life (Zoe)!" The lame man is **healed in the name of Jesus; by faith in His name!** Proclamation: Law and Gospel!
2. You acted in **ignorance. BUT now** is the time for repentance and forgiveness. Moses promised that God would send a prophet like him (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). Do whatever he tells you. **Warning:** What happens to those who don't listen (Acts 3:23; destroyed)? God promised Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) that all families of the earth would be blessed through his OFFSPRING (singular); i.e. Jesus. God raised Jesus up so that we could receive the blessing and turn from our wickedness. One can't believe in God and reject Jesus (an oxymoron). The risen Lord brings to light our hidden guilt and lifts the burden that crushes every sinner. His WORD points out our shame; His grace wipes away our sin.
3. **Acts 4** ... Peter and John are arrested/questioned by the Temple Authorities (Jerusalem Sanhedrin; including Sadducees—didn't believe in the resurrection). **Church Growth is the power of the Holy Spirit.** 2:41 – 3000 souls added to the church. 4:4 – 5000 men added to the church following the **healing of the cripple (lame man).** **The question:** By what power or name did the lame man get healed? The question provides Peter with **another opportunity to preach/witness.** Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, preaches Christ crucified & risen; and **quotes Psalm 118** – rejected stone becomes cornerstone. **VERSE 12:** NO OTHER NAME by which we MUST be saved!

TEXT: Psalm 23 – The LORD IS My Shepherd! – A Song of TRUST!

1. The **vulnerability of sheep.** Their **only protection is in flocking.** A lost sheep is a sitting duck. Bible passages offer assurance to God's people that their Lord is with them, to lead them as their shepherd (Psalms 95:7 and 100:3), to rescue the scattered and bring them to their own land (Ezekiel 34:11-16), and to gather lambs to God's bosom and gently lead them home (Isaiah 40:11); see also Luke 15.
2. **Psalm 23, is spoken by one who knows fresh pain.** The writer speaks for a community that has recently walked through the darkest valley, and has emerged, trembling and stumbling and blinking in the light. Just such a story of suffering and deliverance is told in **Psalm 22**, and **the two psalms can be read as companions.** It is **in response to the desperate laments of Psalm 22 that the writer of Psalm 23 delightedly proclaims, again and again, trust in the Lord.** It is as if the **desperation of 22 is matched by the exuberant trust of 23.** Yet the exuberance does not erase the pain; rather, assurances of God's care are a salve applied precisely to the particular wounds of Psalm 22.
3. Psalm 22 describes an affliction so acute that the very body and spirit of the sufferer are wasting away. In response to this, the speaker in Psalm 23 describes **the restoration that God the Shepherd provides.** Green pastures, still waters, a rod to protect and a staff to guide, all of this restores the soul. The table set **in the presence of those enemies refreshes the parched throat with an overflowing cup.** **God is the Host at a feast of thanksgiving, and the sufferer is the honored guest,** whose head is anointed with oil. In response to the sufferer's wasting away in Psalm 22, Psalm 23 depicts the overflowing refreshment of God's presence, which restores the sufferer in body and soul. **Divine deliverance does not mean that evil is eradicated.** The Psalmist sits at table in the presence of enemies; but we walk through the Valley...we don't remain there. **The house of the Lord** is our permanent residence—days without end.

4. Where is God? "Green pastures; still waters; the valley of the death shadow". **Emmanuel: God with us.** The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge (Psalm 46).

TEXT: I John 3:16-24 — Love One Another

1. **1 John 3:1-7**, draws a sharp line between believers and unbelievers, with no middle ground. Believers are to have nothing to do with unbelievers. **Be like Him. Purify yourselves as He is pure.** Got hope?
2. It seems quite possible that the **theological debates in the community of 1 John** are debates about how they were interpret the Gospel of John, which was likely their central scriptural guide. Early on, some Christians maintained that the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel was barely human, not so much the Word become flesh as **the Word pretending to be flesh**. I John was written in part to combat that heresy; interpretation. "Beloved, **do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits** to see whether they are from God. For many **false prophets** have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit **that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh** is from God" (1 John 4:1-2).
3. Realized Eschatology: Now and Not Yet. I John provides a word about **now and then**. Mystery as to what we shall be. But this much we do know. When Christ appears, we shall **be like Him** for we shall see Him as He is. **What we do know** is that God has decided to call us CHILDREN, right NOW. Jesus loves us to the end, and then some. Hope and Seeing (I Cor. 13:12). **What's our Practice/Habit?**
4. **Theme of sin and righteousness**. 1 John can be a bit confusing when it comes to sin. The author insists: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him [Christ] a liar, and his Word is not in us" (1 John 1:10). Yet it also claims that "no one who abides in Christ sins" (1 John 3:6). Here, the identity of the believer with Christ is so strong that the believer takes on Christ's sinlessness as part of her own identity. **Luther: We are simultaneously justified/righteous and sinner. Abiding in Christ** means that **one loathes sin and cannot make a practice out of sinning**. Who's your daddy (John 8)? God the Father of TRUTH, or the Devil, the father of lies? Children of God love one another.
5. **This Text is a Commentary on John 15:1-17**. The message we have heard from the beginning: Love one another. Don't be like the murderer Cain. Failure to love = abiding in death. Hate makes us murderers. **BY THIS we know: The proof is in the pudding**. Jesus laid down his life and so shall we. Sacrifice is not a dirty word. **Love in deed and truth, not just word or talk**. Talk is cheap. Credible Christians practice the preaching of Jesus. Got stuff? Then share with brothers/sisters in need. **God's commandment: Believe in Jesus and love one another**. The Spirit is proof of our mutual abiding with God. We do what pleases God and get whatever we ask the Father in the name of Jesus.

TEXT: John 10:11-18 – I AM ... The Good Shepherd.

1. **Verses 1-16 is four distinct allegories**, artfully woven together. **Allegory 1)** verses 1-3a – Who has proper access to the sheepfold? **Allegory 2)** verses 3b-6 – The Shepherd knows the sheep and the sheep recognize the Shepherd's voice. **Allegory 3)** verses 7-10 – Jesus is **the GATE/DOOR** for the sheep. Sheep passed through the legs of their shepherd as they entered the fold; being examined and anointed with oil. **Allegory 4)** verses 11-16 – Jesus is **the Good Shepherd**. "**Lay down his life**" is found four times in verses 11, 15, 17, & 18. Jesus is the GREAT "I AM" (*ego eimi*) in human flesh. If Jesus is the Shepherd, then we are His sheep, **called to "followership"**. Near East shepherds lead and the sheep follow. Shepherds in the West drive their sheep. Sheep have **voice recognition**. Thieves, bandits, hirelings (hired hands) care nothing for the sheep; fleecing of the sheep for personal gain. The Shepherd gives life by losing His life for the sheep; an atoning sacrifice, **not just an example** to follow.
2. **Who are the other sheep?** **Gentiles** enfolded into the New Israel of God. The sheep know the Shepherd in the same way that the Son knows the Father. Jesus says, "I and the Father are one". This claim (blasphemy or Truth?) will get Jesus crucified. No one can snatch God's lambs out of the hands of their Good Shepherd. **Seven Signs in Book of Signs** (1:19-12:50); Book of Glory (13:1-20:31).