**Notes for Next Sunday**

Fourth Sunday of Easter

**The Point of this Week’s Readings**

This week’s readings emphasize Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

The Psalm (Psalm 23) summarizes it well when the statement is made in verse 1: “I shall not want.” David is not referring to material or physical poverty when he made the statement. He means I shall not lack the expert care and management of my Master. The specific benefits which the Lord supplies are then voiced in the rest of the psalm.

The First Reading (Acts 4:1-12) gives evidence that the power of the Resurrection lives on after the resurrection in the lives of Christians. Peter and John had healed the beggar and were now teaching the people about the resurrection of Jesus. This had caused quite a stir, and many were brought to faith. The religious leaders did not want this to go on. They brought Peter and John before them to explain by what power they had done this miracle. Peter and John use this setting to witness to Christ and His resurrection.

In the Epistle (1 John 3:16-24) we hear John telling his readers that Jesus’ death and resurrection will result in faith-response actions in the lives of Christians. These actions will help us know that we are of the truth. That truth will help us when our heart condemns us. Then we will know that God is greater than our heart, and we know that His love, in the person of Jesus, offers forgiveness of sin and a stronger faith.

In the Gospel (John 10:11-18) Jesus declares Himself the Good Shepherd. Jesus then goes on to give the many reasons for why He is the “Good Shepherd.” The reason He can make this claim is that He lays down His life and takes it up again (resurrection). Jesus points out that He knows His sheep like He and the Father know each other. There is no closer relationship than that. Jesus also points to the inclusion of the Gentiles (other sheep) which includes us.

*For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.*

**Psalm 23**

1﻿ **The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. ﻿2﻿ He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ﻿3﻿ he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. ﻿4﻿ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,﻿I will 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 love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

The following are some insights to individual verses…

The Lord (v. 1) is the great name of God, Yahweh. This name always connotes God’s absolute faithfulness to His people. He always keeps His promises.

Shepherd (v. 1) is a widely used metaphor for kings in the ancient Near East, and also in Israel.

Makes (v. 2) has the meaning to provide a setting which will bring about a certain action.

Green pastures (v. 2) are places where God gives His spiritual gifts, namely forgiveness of sin and life and salvation.

Quiet waters (v. 2) are literally “waters of resting places,” i.e., restful waters (CSB). When sheep are well filled with luscious grass and have bee refreshed from the sparkling clear water, they lie down to rest. Thus also the sheep of Jesus (Christians) well-nourished in body and soul, find complete rest, peace, and contentment in the Lord, their Good Shepherd.

Restores my soul(v. 3) means that God revives me, refreshes my spirit.

Guides me in paths of righteousness (v. 3) makes it is also possible that our paths conform to God’s moral will.

Shadow of death (v. 4) may be translated “the darkest valley.” This verse may, therefore, refer to all the dangers a Christian faces, not only death.

Rod (v. 4) was a club about 2 feet long. It was an instrument of authority. It was also used by shepherds for counting, guiding, rescuing and protecting sheep.

Staff (v. 4) was a long straight walking stick used to guide the sheep and pull down lefty branches for them. (TLSB)

Prepare a table (v. 5) was an emblem of hospitality and trust. In Christ, God gives us not only ordinary food but also the gift of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. (TLSB)

Anoint my head with oil (v. 5) was done to a banquet quest as a sign of hospitality. The oil acted like lotion, soothing the skin. Shepherds carried such oil in cattle- or ram- horn containers. (TLSB)

Dwell in the house of the Lord forever (v. 6) was more than worship in the tabernacle. God’s people not only know His blessings in this life but will live with Him in heaven forever. (TLSB)

**First Reading – Acts 4:1-12**

**The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ﻿2﻿ They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ﻿3﻿ They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ﻿4﻿ But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand. ﻿5﻿ The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ﻿6﻿ Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest’s family. ﻿7﻿ They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?” ﻿8﻿ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! ﻿9﻿ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ﻿10﻿ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ﻿11﻿ He is ”‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.‘ ﻿12﻿ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”**

The following are some insights to individual verses…

The evening sacrifices (v. 3) ended about 4:00 p.m., and the temple gates would be closed at that time. Any judgments involving life and death must be begun and concluded in daylight hours. (CSB) Note that Jesus’ trial was at night and was totally illegal.

The five thousand men (v. 4) was a growth from the 3,000 at Pentecost (2:41). This does not mean people. It means “males.” With women and children, therefore, the number of Christians must have exceeded 10,000. These statistics are not given by Luke to bolster the reputation of the apostles. Rather, they are a testimony to the power of the gospel.

Verse 8 refers to Matthew 10:19-20 where Jesus had told the disciples: “When they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” Luke wants us to know that there is a difference this time in Peter being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus comes to us by means of His Name (Word). That Name (v. 12) creates faith. And by faith in His Name, He saves us. There is no substitute, no alternative. Faith in that Name alone, saves people for all time. The Sadducees, who had caused the arrest, were literally left speechless.

**Epistle – 1 John 3:16-24**

**16﻿ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ﻿17﻿ If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ﻿18﻿ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. ﻿19﻿ This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence ﻿20﻿ whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ﻿21﻿ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ﻿22﻿ and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. ﻿23﻿ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ﻿24﻿ Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.**

The following are some insights to individual verses…

The source of all love and the ultimate example and pattern for love is, of course, Jesus Christ (v. 16) His magnificent self-sacrifice on Calvary’s cross not only bought for us the forgiveness we needed to be God’s children again. It also inspires us to love and forgive people in our lives.

To communicate one’s earthly goods to the brother in need is an evidence of brotherly love. Giving which requires self-denial is a token of love (v. 17). Whoever is not ready to practice self-denial to help the brother suffering want shuts up his heart against his brother.

Dear children/little children (ESV) means “my beloved children,” this is a very affectionate greeting by a father to children whom he tenderly loves. They are his darlings.

Verses 20-21 point out that we sometimes are our own worst enemies. Our consciences are over-active because we continue to live under the burden of the Law when God has already freed us from that load. When this happens we live defensively hoping not to make mistakes rather than boldly serving the Lord.

The confidence mentioned in verse 21 is so self-assured that there is nothing that can be said that is too extreme a statement.

**Gospel – John 10:11-18**

**11﻿ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ﻿12﻿ The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ﻿13﻿ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ﻿14﻿ “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ﻿15﻿ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ﻿16﻿ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ﻿17﻿ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ﻿18﻿ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.**

The following are some insights to individual verses…

The hired person (v. 12) is not a shepherd, does not own the sheep, sacrifices the sheep in self-interest, and cares nothing about the sheep. Jesus is here describing false teachers and false messiahs of all ages, especially the Pharisees who were listening to Him. By way of contrast, Jesus is the Excellent Shepherd, who owns the sheep, who knows His sheep as intimately as the Father knows the Son and vice versa, and, basic to all, He sacrifices Himself in the interest of the sheep.

Jesus, the “good shepherd,” does not lose His sheep. He knows us (v. 14), and He has led us to know the Father and Him. This knowledge surpasses just recognizing each other; even the devil recognizes Jesus. This knowledge binds one to the other in love.

There shall therefore be one fold (v. 16), one invisible church, one living communion with the one Shepherd, Jesus Christ, as Head and Overseer.