

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 25, 2021

Psalm 23:1–6 (ESV):

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

3 He restores my soul.

He leads 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 mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

forever.

First Reading: Acts 4:1–12 (ESV):

Peter and John Before the Council

4 And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 But many of those

who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

5 On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, 6 with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, 9 if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. 11 This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

EPISTLE: 1 John 3:16–24 (ESV):

16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 17 But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

19 By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; 20 for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; 22 and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. 23 And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. 24 Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

THE GOSPEL - John 10:11–18 (ESV):

11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good

shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, **15** just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. **16** And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. **17** For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may 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 I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

Sermon 17 – Fourth Sunday of Easter

“In Nomine”

Acts 4:1-12

Dear friends,

What is in a name? We choose names these days for their sound, their history, their heritage, sometimes their meaning. My parents named me Noah not just because it was a character in the Bible but also because they liked that Noah meant “caring.” You probably have your own stories for why your parents named you the way they did, maybe it was after a relative, maybe they liked the meaning. You can certainly tell me why you named your children the way you did. The point is, names have changed throughout history. In Biblical times, the name of a person said something meaningful about them. There was tremendous weight to the naming of an individual, it almost functioned like a prophecy about that person, or a reflection of your aspirations for the person. Think of how many times in the Bible that God changes a person's life, and then tells them that they have a new name. Saul becomes Paul. Abram becomes Abraham. Jacob becomes Israel. To people in the Bible, names have power. Divine names, the names of gods, have even more power, because they're gods. In what name you do something carries the weight of that something. Why am I telling you this? Because it is part of understanding what these readings from Acts are on about, but only part. The name of Jesus is powerful, but why and in what way? That's what I'm going to talk about here.

This continues the early Acts of the apostles, immediately after the miraculous healing we talked about last week. Peter and John have healed a man crippled, and this is seriously upsetting to the authorities as you'll see. We'll talk about that more in a second, but this is the beginning of the very confused relationship that the early disciples have with the religious authorities. They're not defying them, at least that's not their point, and the disciples are doing these things in the Jewish temple during Jewish worship hours. That's important to remember. These fellows didn't have to be in the temple anymore, but they were. They're trying to be good sons of God, and in doing so, they're preaching about Jesus being raised from the dead. The authorities don't know what to make of this, and I'll try to bring some sense to that now.

“And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” Why are they annoyed? You could say a couple of things, but Luke, the writer of this book, doesn't really elaborate, so it's all speculation. It seems kinda overly protective, kinda defensive, for them to behave this way, but please remember that this was basically the disciples preaching and doing miracles during church. The comparison doesn't work all that well, but imagine if somebody right now stood up and started preaching a sermon and doing miracles. It would be very disruptive, it would be kind of annoying, and that person would probably have to at least answer some questions. They want to know what all the fuss is about, so they go ask their questions. The temple is very crowded, there's a lot going on, and the captain of the guard is coming with them, so picture the guys in charge and the head bouncer marching forward. It makes a scene. Luke says they were annoyed at what they were preaching, but why?

Jesus' resurrection from the dead has always annoyed sinners, because it is the truth, and we do not like truths that we do not come up with. We want our truth, not *the* truth, and this is a problem for us. More to the point, though, the Sadducees as a party

did not believe in the resurrection, they were very public about their disdain for the idea that bodies rose from the dead. So the party line was being violated too. The Sadducees had what they said, and what the disciples were saying was going directly against what their positions were. This made them predictably quite upset. Sin builds its little kingdoms and it doesn't like it when those positions are challenged. This why talking about these things has always been incendiary, people don't like having their pet truths contradicted. So we can easily call this pride, we can easily call it sin, and we can recognize it because we see it in our world today and in ourselves if we're honest.

The disciples are arrested, which seems harsh, but that's the time period. **“5 On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, 6 with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?”**

I have always wondered why the Sadducees chose to ask the question this way. They don't ask why, they don't ask for reasons, they don't ask for purpose. They ask by *what name* this is done, and they seem to equivocate name and power. Again, to these people, names are power and purpose. Think of the entirety of the Second Commandment. God tells us not to misuse His name. The Hebrews had creative ways to get around this, by assigning Him titles, like Lord and Father and referring to Him as the God of heaven. Why is all that necessary? A name is just a name, its just an identifier to us. To them, a name was the power and the destiny of the thing. A name was its fundamental essence, but also its future, what it is and what it will be. Names have power. Names are power. God's name is power. Do not invoke it idly.

As strange as it seems to us, Peter is completely unfazed by this. He gets what they're going for, and he answers accordingly. **“8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, 9 if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been**

healed, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. 11 This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Jesus is the name that makes this guy well. The name of Jesus encompasses everything He is. Remember that Jesus was given His name by God. God specifically told Mary and Joseph both that the Messiah would have this name. The power of Jesus is all found in His name. Jesus means “The Lord is salvation.” It's all there. It's all there in Jesus' name, and everything in Jesus' name is delivered to us His people through His resurrection from the dead.

Peter makes this connection clear. God raised Jesus from the dead, therefore His name, His power, Jesus' whole function, is triumph over death. What is genetic illness, what is sickness, what is age, what is pain and cruelty and all the other awful things that we lament in this world? What are they? They're little deaths. Genetic drift means that parts of our body, like this guy's legs, just don't work right. They do not function as life. Illness turns the body's defense mechanisms against themselves. Life's function, the mechanisms that make us living people, turn against us. Age is the wearing out of the life-giving body. Pain is the firing of nerve mechanisms designed to warn us of danger or damage. It all has to do with death. Jesus name, therefore, lifts death from the body across the board in all its facets. It isn't just the final passing that we all go through when our lives end, Jesus' name is the solution for all the little reminders of death that we go through. There is salvation in no one else, Peter says, this is the only name that does this. Jesus' name triumphs over the death of our body, the illnesses that plague our body, the age that overcomes our body, and everything else. His name brings life, across the board. To the body, when it finally does die. To the soul, as it withers under the onslaughts of

this world's wickedness. We are revived by the name of Jesus, because we know all the power that name has and what that name means.

That name means the crucifixion. That name means the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins, which means we have nothing to be ashamed of as we approach God. We have nothing to hide. We don't have to put on a front and pretend we're something we're not. We don't have to prove anything to Him, we can just come, not being afraid of who we are or what we bring. That name means that when we come to Jesus, He receives us graciously, kindly, and lovingly. That name means that God, the God, is our God. We don't have to wonder what it's all about, why life takes the twists and turns it does. We instead can know, for certain, that God has brought us Jesus, and that Jesus has brought us life. There is no other name that can revive the soul like that. There is no other name that can tell you that you will suffer, you will die, but that it will be okay, because you belong to Him. Jesus did all that too, He did it first, and He did it so that when we do it, we'll rise to life just like He did.

What's in a name? When the name is Jesus' name, a lot. I urge you to make Jesus' name what you call to mind when the road gets hard, long, tedious or uncertain. Bring Jesus' name to mind when you need something badly and it just won't come. Bring Jesus' name to mind when you disgrace yourself with sin and you think God has forsaken you. Jesus name will trump all those lies of the devil and will remind you what is true. There is no other name, there is no other power, that can make God like you. There is nothing else on this earth that can make God happy with you. And there is nothing else you will have when the judgment comes for you. Thanks be to God, there is nothing else you need. When God comes for you, you can say, all I have is Jesus. God will tell you, relax, that's all you've ever needed. I made sure of it.

Amen.