

EASTER 4

Year B

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Acts 4:5-12

⁵The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, ⁶with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" ⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹if we are being questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are being asked how this man has been healed, ¹⁰let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. ¹¹This Jesus is

‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders;
it has become the cornerstone.’

¹²“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

Commentary from Sarah Neumann

This passage finds Peter and John having been arrested for teaching the Gospel to crowds of people. When they're brought in front of the powers-that-be, rather than denying what they were doing or keeping silent, Peter doubles down and reaffirms that the healing and teaching they were doing was, in fact, in the name of Jesus Christ. When the chips were down, Peter chose not to lie to avoid trouble. Instead, "filled with the Holy Spirit," he tells the truth, even while knowing that it could have dire consequences.

It's exceptionally difficult to maintain a commitment to the truth when your personal safety and well-being are at risk. And yet, this is the call that the disciples knew they must answer. They take a big risk to continue preaching the Gospel, even and especially after seeing how the authorities tortured and killed Jesus. Their courage and commitment speak to the significance and depth of their belief in the Gospel, as well as their charge to continue to teach others about Jesus even in the face of personal danger.

Discussion Questions

What examples from history can you think of where an individual or group refused to compromise on telling the truth? What were the consequences? Was it worth it?

What are your most deeply held beliefs? Where do they come from, and how do they influence your life?

Psalm 23

- ¹ The Lord is my shepherd; *
I shall not be in want.
- ² He makes me lie down in green pastures *
and leads me beside still waters.
- ³ He revives my soul *
and guides me along right pathways for his
Name's sake.
- ⁴ Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of
death,
I shall fear no evil; *
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
- ⁵ You spread a table before me in the presence of
those who trouble me; *
you have anointed my head with oil,
and my cup is running over.
- ⁶ Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all
the days of my life, *
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for
ever.

Commentary from Sarah Neumann

This psalm is one of the most well-known pieces of Scripture in the entire Biblical canon. It is often memorized and recited to provide comfort, reassurance, and hope in difficult situations. Like many people, I often get nervous while flying. During takeoff, I find myself often whispering this psalm to myself under my breath as a way to provide comfort and remind myself that God is present even in frightening or dangerous situations.

Here, the psalmist proclaims God's faithfulness and steadfastness. God never leaves us alone to fend for ourselves, nor forgets us when we need guidance, reassurance, or help. When we are in the midst of trouble, these truths can feel far away. The words of the psalm, however, help us to remain strong in our faith even during those times of uncertainty and fear.

Discussion Questions

Are there certain prayers or words from Scripture that bring you comfort?

What have been some of the "valley[s] of the shadow of death" that you've walked through in your life? Were you able to feel God's presence during those times?

1 John 3:16-24

¹⁶ We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

¹⁸ Little children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth. ¹⁹ And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us, for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹ Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God, ²² and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

²³ And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴ All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

Commentary from Sarah Neumann

Most of us have probably heard the expression, “It’s not enough to talk the talk, you have to walk the walk.”

This sums up this passage well, as it reminds us that living the Gospel demands not just saying the right things, but also taking action for truth and justice.

Following God’s commandments isn’t something we do to earn God’s love – that, after all, is a gift freely given to us. Instead, it’s a way of demonstrating the love that we have received and the desire to act with integrity in the world, loving others and doing what is right.

Discussion Questions

Is love an action, a feeling, or something else? How do you know when you are seeing someone act out of love?

What does it mean to lay down one’s life for another? How might you be being called to live out this commandment in your own life?

John 10:11-18

¹¹“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

Commentary from Sarah Neumann

The Good Shepherd is one of the most enduring and powerful images of Christ, and a metaphor that helps us to understand the ways in which God loves us. In this passage, Jesus makes the distinction between a hired hand who abandons the sheep when times get tough, and a shepherd who never gives up on protecting his flock, even when it requires him to lay down his own life.

It is a powerful thing to know that we are loved so deeply and relentlessly, as Jesus describes to his followers here in this passage. Although difficulties and dangers are part of living a human life, Jesus assures us that ultimately, we have the protection of his self-sacrificial love which will never leave us out in the cold.

Discussion Questions

What would you do if you knew you were protected and could not fail?

What metaphors for Christ's love do you find most powerful? What do you picture when you hear “the Good Shepherd?”