

EASTER: A TIME TO REJOICE

Fourth Sunday of Easter
Good Shepherd Sunday
May 15, 2011

Acts 2:42-47

Psalm 23

1 Peter 2:19-25

John 10:1-10

Jesus our Good Shepherd

Chapter 10:1-21 in John's Gospel account is often referred to as the "Good Shepherd" discourse, and it is actually a continuation of John 9:41, where Jesus upbraids his antagonists for their spiritual blindness. His words to the religious leaders, condemning their false piety, are not unlike those spoken by the prophets Jeremiah (23:1-4) and Ezekiel (34:1-10) when they criticized Israel's leaders (shepherds) for their disregard and mistreatment of God's people, the flock entrusted to their care.

In biblical literature, "shepherd" is a common metaphor for leaders. Good leaders shepherd their people according to the ways of God; bad leaders, as cited in Ezekiel 34:8, exploit the people and seek to serve themselves. When preparing for his succession, Moses prayed and asked God to appoint someone for the people who would "lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep without a shepherd" (Numbers 27:17, *NRSV*).

In Matthew's Gospel, we read how Jesus felt compassion for the crowd because "they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (9:36, *NRSV*). Just as Ezekiel prophesied that God would become the shepherd of the sheep and "bind up the injured" and "strengthen the weak" (34:16), Jesus has come to gather us, his sheep, into his loving arms (Isaiah 40:11), comfort us with his rod and staff (Psalm 23:4), and lead us into the warm embrace and safety of his care, where we will "find pasture" (John 10:9) and be refreshed (Psalm 23:2, 3). The text from 1 Peter (2:25, *NRSV*), based on a quote from Isaiah 53:6, reminds us that at one time we were "going astray like sheep," but that, with Jesus, we have "now returned to the shepherd and guardian of [our] souls."

In this week's Gospel text, Jesus tells us that he is the gate through whom all who enter will be saved (10:9). He came "to seek out and save the lost" (Luke 19:10, *NRSV*), as illustrated in the parable of the lost sheep which is recorded in two of the Gospels (Matthew 18:10-14; Luke 15:3-7). Further, Jesus assures us that no one will be able to snatch his sheep out of his hand (John 10:28).

As our shepherd, Jesus knows each of us by name. As sheep, we know his voice and follow him. His voice is one of love, and he offers us life – life in abundance (10:10). Amidst a cacophony of false and alluring voices that we encounter in our society today, we are exhorted to discern the voice of our Shepherd. Jesus, our Good Shepherd, is truly

“the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6, *NRSV*). Let us listen for his voice, heed it, and seek to follow him.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel who served on the staff of the American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship and continues as a consultant to ABS.

+ + +

This week we remember to pray for Bible work in: Congo (Democratic Republic) – with thanks to God for all that the Society has been able to accomplish with God’s help; and with prayers for translation, production and distribution work, and for the HIV and AIDS, *Faith Comes By Hearing*, and literacy programs; also pray for additional funds for staff members and their families, for supporters of the Society, and for the Bible Society and Service Organization colleagues, and for ABS’s *She’s My Sister* initiative responding to the violent acts of war in the Eastern DRC; **Congo (Brazzaville)** – with thanks to God for progress with the Beembe and Lari translation projects, for the partnership with the Salvation Army, for the *Good Samaritan* program and for the new depots in Owando and Queso; and with prayers for the annual general meeting, for the new board members, for the relationships with the churches, for distribution and fundraising work and for the development plan; also pray that God’s Word will touch all parts of the society; **Burundi** – with thanks to God for good relations with the Churches and for volunteers and staff, that God will continue to bless them and use them to do his work; and with prayers for translation and distribution projects, for understanding between ethnic groups and for a responsible attitude among the leaders, that they, both religious and secular, will follow God’s way; **Rwanda** – with thanks to God for board members and staff and for their efforts to serve the Bible cause; and with prayers that all Churches will make the Bible their focus and that people’s hearts will be moved to support God’s work through the Bible Society.

Activity Corner: “Seeking the Sheep”

Supplies needed: Bible; two sheets of newsprint; markers. For young children: black construction paper, scissors, pencils, glue, and cotton balls.

On one sheet, write “Shepherd” across the top, and on the other sheet write “Sheep.” Look up the following passages in the Bible: Psalm 23; Psalm 28:9; Psalm 80:1-3; Psalm 100:3; Psalm 119:176; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 23:1-4; Ezekiel 34; Zechariah 10:2; Matthew 9:35-38; Matthew 18:1-14; Luke 15:3-7. On newsprint write down what these passages say about shepherds and sheep. Discuss what it means to be a shepherd for God’s people and what it means to be like sheep who follow the Lord.

Invite younger children to trace their hand on a sheet of black construction paper (make sure their fingers are spread apart as far as possible). After the hand has been cut out, turn it upside down and glue cotton balls on the hand to cover it, with the exception of half the thumb and fingers (the thumb will become the sheep’s “head” and the fingers will become the sheep’s “legs”). Discuss with children what it means to be a sheep that follows Jesus.