

The Lectionary with Vicar

The appointed readings for this upcoming Sunday are taken from Acts 2:42-47; I Peter 2:19-25; and John 10:1-10. I encourage you to open your Bibles and read through these passages with me.

Acts 2:42-47

After Peter's Pentecost Sermon, Luke tells us what the early community of believers looked like. The essential elements of this Christian community are listed up front: teaching of the apostles, fellowship, breaking of the bread, and prayer. These are the elements that mark the church as the church. The Scriptures that have been handed down to us still bring us the teachings of the apostles. We are united in prayer before God as a regular part of our service. A large part of church life is fellowship together, and in this time of isolation, we are trying to discover ways to maintain fellowship while physically separated. And although we are currently fasting from the Lord's Supper, breaking bread together is an important element in our life together as Christians.

I do want to take a moment to remark on the communal living aspect of this passage. Although this passage is sometime used in support of some kind of Christian socialism, the passage is not talking about a government program, rather it shows what loving Christians were doing for their brothers and sisters in Christ, namely looking out for the needs of one another, whatever those may be. This passage is much more about the love and care that Christians were showing one another than it is a prescriptive way of living. Ultimately, this passage is not about how we should use our wealth, rather it is focused on what a Christian community looks like – the main elements of Christian life all bound together by love and care for one another.

I Peter 2:19-25

Peter continues his letter with a note about suffering in the life of a Christian. He begins by telling his audience that they will suffer if they do what is right, but he encourages them to do right anyway. His reasoning is simple: if you do bad and are punished, that is justice. If you do good and are punished, you are honored. To strengthen them through the suffering that will come, Peter points them to the example of Jesus. Jesus didn't just do good, He was the perfect example of innocence, and yet even He suffered. When we suffer, we are participating in the suffering of Jesus.

This passage then picks up a different thread than what the Acts passage said. Peter shows us how we are made into this community described in Acts. He tells us that we are brought into God's flock by the Shepherd and Overseer, Jesus, who suffered for our sake even though He was innocent. When we participate in His suffering, we are made part of this community even more so, but ultimately, our membership in the community rests entirely on the suffering and work of Christ Jesus.

John 10:1-10

Finally, in our Gospel reading, we read the beginning of Jesus' discourse on the Good Shepherd. We notice the same imagery as is found in I Peter, but here Jesus explains it more fully. He starts off by talking about leaders and teachers – although it may not be so obvious at first. He is comparing the Jewish leaders with himself. What Jesus is doing in the first five verses is proposing a test for true teachers – all those who enter by the door are true, the others are false robbers and thieves.

Then in the final four verses, Jesus reveals what the door is, the key to discerning between a good and bad teacher. Jesus himself is the door. Those who come teaching and preaching in the name of Jesus Christ are good teachers who belong with the flock, those who do not preach Jesus Christ are false teachers who will bring destruction. And as we know, Jesus will take it one step further, because He is not just the door, He is also the Good Shepherd, the perfect teacher and leader who comes to us teaching about himself.

So here we find one more description of the Christian community. We are the sheep, Jesus is the shepherd. There are a few separate ideas contained in this metaphor. First, we are known by Jesus. The shepherd knows each of His sheep by name. He knows who they are. Second, we know Jesus. The sheep know their shepherd, they recognize His voice. The sheep will not follow a fake shepherd. Third, we follow Jesus and trust Him to guide us and provide for us. The sheep go in and out to pasture and are kept safe from thieves and robbers.

A Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, through baptism in Your name we have been made members of Your flock. Shepherd us through the dangers of this life. Comfort us with the power of Your voice. And lead us into pastures where we may find life and salvation, in order that we may live with You in Your kingdom to all eternity. In Your powerful name we pray. Amen.