

4 Easter Year B

4/25/2021

Acts 4:5-12; Psalm 23; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18

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When I was young, I wanted to be like my sports heroes, music heroes, whatever it was... that I was into in that moment.

Whether it was sports, music, acting, etc. the professionals are so good at what they do...

they make it look like so much fun...

and they sometimes get paid lots of money for doing what they enjoy.

So, naturally the thing to do is to pick up a guitar or a basketball and see what you can do.

And you usually find out really quick that it doesn't happen overnight.

It takes lots of practice...

And so, when you learn to do something whether in sports, work, or music you usually have to start with the basics.

You don't just start at the top of your field.

You have to learn the fundamentals.

And even when you get good at your trade...

you still have to practice the fundamentals... the basics.

You have to remind yourself again and again.

So, as I was meditating on our readings this week what jumped out at me was the basics of our passages.

Timeless truth...

Theological fundamentals.

Things that we should know as followers of Jesus Christ...

And also, things that we should remind ourselves often...

Because if we don't our understanding of God and his work in this world can get out of sorts.

Even in our Christian faith we have fundamentals.

So, with that, I have four basics of the Christian faith from our reading today.

Number one – Jesus laid down his life for us.

Because of sin in our lives and in this world, we are in need of salvation.

And the remedy to sin...

The person who supplies that salvation is Jesus Christ...

Who gave his life for us on the cross so that we might be saved.

Every so often someone will suggest that the Jews killed Jesus.

Or that the Romans killed Jesus.

Or that Judas ultimately is responsible for killing Jesus because he betrayed him.

But although the Jews tried Jesus in an unjust court in the secret of night.

Although the Romans tortured Jesus and hung him on a cross.

Although Judas did betray Jesus with a kiss.

It was Jesus, himself, who laid down his life for us.

The Good Shepherd laid down his life for his sheep.

St. John writes this in the beginning of our reading from his first epistle.

Saying:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

Jesus says the same thing in our Gospel reading from John.

Five times Jesus says – *I lay down my life.*

So fundamental truth number one – Who killed Jesus?

Jesus laid down his own life, of his own accord, his own will, and he did this for us – his sheep.

Number two – There is only one Good Shepherd.

This is a truth of our Christian faith that many people struggle with. Our culture is pluralistic, just like in the days of the Roman Empire. Different faith groups or religions should certainly learn to coexist... But that does not mean that we share the same path.

There are a lot of voices out there wanting our attention. But there is only one voice that calls us to his own and lays down his life and gives us eternal life.

In our tradition and faith...

In our Holy Scriptures...

There is only one person that we may go through in order to be saved from our sins.

There is only one way to receive eternal life and that is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is our baptismal confession.

And Jesus says in our Gospel today: *I am the good shepherd.*

He does not say I am one of the shepherds.

He says he is the good shepherd that lays his life down for the sheep.

He even emphasizes this truth saying that there is *one flock and one shepherd*.

St. Peter preached this message in our reading from Acts.

At the end of our reading Peter says concerning Jesus:

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

So fundamental truth number two – By whose name can we receive salvation?

Only by the name of Jesus Christ who is the Good Shepherd.

Number three – We should be filled with the Spirit.

When we do not live in the fullness of the Triune God... the Trinity... we often fail by trying to live the Christian walk on our own.

It becomes hard and burdensome.

We might give to legalism... or... apathy...

Which are two problematic extremes.

We tend to put a legalistic look on instead of grace...

Or we just give up...

A sort of laissez-faire Christianity.

But our readings are full of God in three persons.

The blessed Trinity.

We have God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

And the way we know we have been forgiven by God the Father,

And the way we know that we abide in God the Son,

Comes in our last verse of 1 John:

And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

You see the way we know that we are Christians...

Is because the Spirit is alive within us.

And life in the Spirit is not just a moment in time event...

It is a continual walk...

A continual asking for God to fill us with His Spirit.

We are to be full of the Spirit of God.

And that is something we ask for.

In Acts, we read a description of St. Peter where he is described as being *filled with the Holy Spirit*.

Notice the Scriptures here do not say he had the Spirit.

Nor does it say that he once received the Spirit.

It says he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

And that is a continual action...

We walk in the Spirit...

Asking to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Praying: *Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful...*

When we continually ask for God to fill us with the Holy Spirit,
we resist the temptation to become legalistic...

Or the temptation to become apathetic... indifferent to things of God.

So fundamental truth number three – How do we stay faithful in this
world to the call of God?

By being filled with the Holy Spirit.

**Number four – Our posture toward people in this world should be
sacrificial love.**

When we stumble with this Christian truth, we often become bitter and
angry with people who do not live up to our perceptions of the way they
should live.

But it is so clear in our readings of Scripture that our life should be most
known by the love we have for one another.

Our reading from 1 John 3 says it so openly:

If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

Our lives should be focused on helping our neighbors flourish in this world. [Repeat]

And the example is set by Jesus Christ...

The Good Shepherd who lays down his life for us.

St. John points this out in our reading:

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

It's a very different way of living than most of our popular culture.

Living a life of sacrificial love toward the people around us is truly one of the most counter-cultural ways of living.

And we live this life because we continually ask God to fill us with his Spirit.

And we ask God to fill us because we believe in the one true God...

Jesus Christ...

The Good Shepherd...

Who laid his life down for us...

In our readings today we have four fundamentals of our faith.

Four basics that we are to live out.

Number one – Jesus laid down his life for us.

Number two – There is only one Good Shepherd.

Number three – We should be filled with the Spirit.

Number four – Our posture toward people in this world should be sacrificial love.

May you be encouraged today by the grace and love of God our Father who through God the Son has redeemed us from our sins so that we may live by the power of the Holy Spirit as we await that glorious day of salvation.

Amen.