

Acts 4:5-12

John 10:11-18

April 22nd

Christ Church

Sometimes when we read a passage from the Bible a sentence or two will seem to stand out – and as I read the passage from Acts it was verses 8-10 which spoke to me.

In the previous chapter, chapter 3, we read how Peter and John had healed a crippled man, in the name of Jesus, they were claiming healing through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who Jesus had left on earth, when he returned to the Father, on his resurrection.

Chapter 4 begins by recording how Peter and John had been arrested for claiming, on the authority of Jesus, that there is a resurrection from the dead.

They were arrested and put into jail until the morning when they were brought before the council of all the rulers and elders and teachers of religion, who were meeting in Jerusalem.

What spoke to me was their response when they were being accused;

They were asked, by what power, or in whose name have you done this – seemingly almost daring them to repeat

their claims...or justify and defend what had happened.

V8 Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, Leaders and elders of our nation, paying them respect,
Are we being questioned because we've done a good deed for a crippled man?
Do you want to know how he was healed?
Let me clearly state to you and to all the people of Israel that he was healed in the name and power of Jesus Christ from Nazareth.
The man you crucified but whom God raised from the dead!!!

So, Stick that in your pipe and smoke it.

That last bit wasn't Peter it was me...getting a bit carried away in the moment.

Although it was actually the Romans that crucified Jesus but the leaders had been complicit in it.

Peter turned the accusation round and instead of defending what they had been accused of he accused the council of wrong doing.

He went on the offensive not the defensive.

You killed him – God raised him from the dead and now he is healing people through his Holy Spirit in us.

And as the man who had been crippled
was standing there – healed

Peter could have said I rest my
case....m’Lord,.....but he didn’t

Peter then goes on to describe Jesus Christ
as the cornerstone of the church – the
stone that holds it intact – without a
cornerstone the building would collapse.

We are living in a much more openly
liberal minded age than ever before – I
think

And we are encouraged to be open
minded and welcoming to all people.
I have no quarrel with that – I endorse that
thought.

A lot of people are nowadays voicing the
belief that although they believe in a God
who created the world – Jesus is a
different matter. I have heard many
people refer to Jesus as a kind and wise
man, even a prophet but the difficulty
seems to be in believing that he is the Son
of God and without belief in him we
cannot even begin to attempt to
understand what life is about or what our
place is in it.

I suppose there have been times in most
of our lives when we have questioned life
and what it’s all about.
Particularly during times of sadness or
grief.

Jesus came to show us what life is about.
Life, if it is to mean anything, is about love.

Jesus demonstrated God's love on earth and after his earthly death he continues to demonstrate God's love through those who believe in his resurrection and who live in the power of his Holy Spirit.

He is always with us even in the times we question life and the things that happen. And it is in his strength that we continue through hard and lonely times.

But the resurrection is about so much more than us and what it means to us,,

By raising Christ God showed his power in starting the work of redeeming the world – and we are a part of that work in progress.

Jesus is not only with us to comfort and heal but to empower us to challenge oppression and injustice as Peter did.

Some of us can be a bit nervous of making waves in life

and the understanding of what it means to be a Christian, it seems to me, is being watered down a bit to being gentle and keeping the peace at all costs.

And we are called to be gentle and to be peacemakers but as Tom Wright recalls: a visiting bishop once complained that he didn't seem to be having the same impact as the first apostles.

Everywhere St Paul went, he said, there was a riot.

Everywhere I go- they serve tea.

Not that I'm advocating we stop serving tea after the service in order to go and cause a riot. Not at all – that would be cutting my nose off to spite my face wouldn't it!!

I am a big believer in the saying we must agree to disagree sometimes.

But when it comes to Jesus we must be sure our agreeing to disagree does not infer that we too doubt – sometimes we have to disagree firmly.

Belief in Jesus as the Son of God is the cornerstone of our faith – begin to doubt that and faith begins to crumble
God didn't raise Jesus from the dead in order for us just to have an agreeable life.

We are meant to enjoy life of course, it's a precious gift, but

We must not forget that we are a working part of God's plan to, one day, restore all thing back to himself.

And of course, the most exciting part of that is that we are not to do it alone.

We have Jesus' promise that he will be with us always even to the end of the age.

In the reading from John's gospel Jesus likens himself to the good shepherd.

And this is where we begin to understand what love, as demonstrated by Jesus, is all about. God's love.

A good shepherd puts his flock before anything else.

He is prepared to face predators, thieves – whoever or whatever threatens his sheep.

Once we commit our lives to Jesus we too are shepherds in his name.

Jesus as the good shepherd was sent to gather other sheep besides the nation of Israel, there were those from Israel who had heard the call were listening and trusting and being drawn to him but God was never interested in only calling Israel – he was calling other sheep from other nations.

and that's where we come in

after he had given his life he left the Holy Spirit to continue his work on earth –

calling all those who would listen - through you and me.

We are meant to shepherd others but never forget that we are also part of the flock.

There are those today who are seeking spiritual enlightenment but sadly seem to by-pass the one who can truly give it.

The word pagan can seem threatening to us, but I find that most pagan religions are well meaning and can be better described as earth religions, people who seek spiritual fulfilment from nature.....or the universe

People who are ethically and environmentally aware – good people

The problem is they have no shepherd so the flock can wander wherever and into who knows what danger.

The shepherd leads the flock rather than herding it..

So, the shepherd goes first feeling out the dangers ahead and the sheep follow.

I read something from a Bible history link on the internet and I found it really interesting.

The love of a shepherd for his sheep is best seen when special times of need call forth unusual acts of care for members of the flock.
e.g. crossing streams

The shepherd leads the way into the water and across the stream. Those favoured sheep who always keep hard by the shepherd, plunge boldly into the water, and are soon across.

Others of the flock enter the stream with hesitation and alarm. Not being close to their guide, they may miss the fording place and be carried down the river at a distance but will *probably?* be able to clamber ashore.

The little lambs may be driven into the water by the dogs, and they are heard to bleat pitifully as they leap and plunge.

Some manage to get across, but if one is swept away then the shepherd leaps quickly into the stream and rescues it, carrying it in his bosom to the shore.

Reflecting on all this, I ask myself:
Have I grown from a lamb into a sheep and
if so

Am I one of the favoured sheep who are
keeping close by the shepherd?

Or, am I one of the ones straying a bit
behind and floundering about in the water
– hopefully scrambling out the other side.

Which one are you?

Jesus said, I am the good shepherd
He also said in v27
My sheep recognise my voice, I know them
and they follow me.
They follow – me not I herd them.

We may identify as part of the flock - but

We can choose to closely follow the
shepherd, confidently and surely into the
rest of today and tomorrow..

Or..... we can choose to wander off and
find ourselves floundering about in the
murky water of regrets and what ifs of
yesterday.

It's not always easy to choose to follow

But we have the choice.

Thanks be to God. Amen.