

Fourth Sunday of Easter
Year B

Acts 4:5-12

Psalm 23

1 John 3:16-24

John 10:11-18

We all know Bishop Curry's line, "If it's not about love, it's not about God." We also have our own ideas about what this love might look like. We can quote scripture after scripture about God's love and the new commandment Jesus gave the disciples, but what does this love look like in practical living situations? How do we show God's love in our lives?

The readings today give us several examples of God's love in action. A quick scan of the readings provides a clear understanding of why this is called "Good Shepherd Sunday." The psalm and the Gospel reading focus on the image of the good shepherd. But, what about the other readings? How do they fit? It's really all about love.

In the story from the Acts of the Apostles, we need to go back a little and catch the beginning of the episode. John and Peter are on their way to the Temple to pray. As they approach the Temple, a beggar who has been cripple from birth is being carried in by friends. They would place him by one of the entrances to the Temple and he would beg for alms every day, sitting in the dust and probably ignored by most. Seeing Peter and John, he asks them for money and gets the surprise of his life. Peter explains they have something better than money - healing in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Peter takes the man by his hand and lifts him to his feet and the man's feet and ankles are immediately strengthened. The commotion this activity caused raised the awareness of the authorities and Peter and John are arrested. The reading for today then takes place.

In the reading, the authorities are only concerned with one thing - power, specifically the power Peter used to affect the healing of the man. While Peter does not expressly say the healing happened because of love, what better example of love is there than to restore the health and dignity of one's fellow man? Peter and John could have thrown a few coins into the man's cup and gone on their way, but they stopped and changed the man's life. That is love.

The Gospel reading about the Good Shepherd is one of the most commonly cited passages about the meaning of God's love. In this passage, Jesus compares the actions of the shepherd with those of the hired hand. Obviously, the shepherd has more investment in the welfare of the sheep, not only monetarily but also emotionally. Thus, the shepherd is willing to put his life on the line for the sheep while the hired hand will just run away when danger comes.

In his first letter, John reminds us of one of the sayings of Jesus, what greater love has man than to lay down his life for a friend. Jesus showed His love for us by doing just that - laying down His life for us. But John takes it further and suggests that showing love is far more than becoming a martyr. We can show love through the actions we take every day when we help those in need. John goes even further by saying we have no love when we pass up an opportunity to

help someone when we have the means to do so. God calls on us to show our love for God through our actions towards those with whom we come in contact daily.

John tells us words are cheap - we can say we love, but if our words and actions don't agree, we are falling short of what God asks of us. In another place, we read that if we can't love the people we see, how can we love God whom we cannot see? If we don't care for the people in our lives, how can we say we love God? But, when we do show that love, when our hearts do not condemn us, as John says in this passage, then we know that God's love abides in us. That is what the Good Shepherd reveals to us - God's love for us and through us to the world.