

Collect

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life:
raise us, who trust in him,
from the death of sin to the life of righteousness,
that we may seek those things which are above,
where he reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

First reading

Acts 4:5-12

The rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is

`the stone that was rejected by you, the builders;
it has become the cornerstone.'

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

Psalm 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd;

I shall not be in want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures
and leads me beside still waters.

3 He revives my soul
and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.

4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I shall fear no evil;

for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

5 You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble
me;

you have anointed my head with oil,
and my cup is running over.

6 Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my
life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Second reading

1 John 3:16-24

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us-- and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and

we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

Gospel reading

John 10:11-18

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

Reflection

Back in 1984 I was selected to go for training for ministry in the church. The process had taken the best part of a year and been done with very few people actually knowing about it. When it was all decided and dates were set for finishing that part of my life, I was able to tell my colleagues in the staffroom that I was leaving and going into the church. Their re-actions were predictably varied, and many a joke was made! One person's response has stayed with me over the years. It was so out of keeping with the others, and perceptive about the nature of ministry. Her first words were, "Do you really think that people are worth it?" I replied that of course I did, or I wouldn't be going through with it. I have to be honest and say that there have been a few times over the last thirty-five years that she came very near to being right! But then I have to admit that even the most obtuse, the awkward, and the difficult are loved by God, so I, (and the rest of us!), should do my best to live by His standard.

St Paul writes in Romans 8 that we are all children of God, with the right to call Him Abba, a child's name for their father. In Matthew 10 Jesus draws the most impressive and yet personal picture of how much God loves each of His children.....that even the hairs on their heads are numbered. Isaiah 49 tells us that God has our names engraved on the palm of His hand, and, of course, John 3:16 tells us the extent to which God loves all His creation, giving His son for all people.

The readings for Easter 4 all tell us of our worthiness of God's love; of the personal relationship we can have with Him; and of how we should follow that example, and love others. Peter tells the high priest's court that the lame man who can now walk has been made whole through the love of Jesus, who offers this same love to all who turn to him. The words of Psalm 23 re-assure us that whatever we may have to go through God is at our side. John reminds us in his

letter of the love of Christ shown for us as He laid down his life for us. He encourages us love others in the same way, “in truth and in action”. (v.18)

In the gospel reading from John 10 Jesus takes the theme of Ps.23 and makes it His own. He is that shepherd, whose care, concern and commitment to the sheep know no limit. He is prepared to lay down his life if necessary. In v.16 of this passage is the inclusion of all people in this promise of the love of God. Jesus is actually addressing the Pharisees at this point, but He makes it quite clear that this offer of a close relationship with God is open to all.

“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”

We are all included. We are all worth it.

A few weeks ago we celebrated Easter, remembering again God’s greatest act of love for His children. Jesus did not hang on the cross just for some, but not others. He did not rise again just for some, but not others. There is no discrimination, no exclusion, in His love. Yes, you are worth it!

This begs the question, that if we are all loved and equally valued by our Heavenly Father, what of those who have no faith at all, or who live lives deliberately contrary to His teaching? Rejection and indifference make no difference to God’s love for His children and we should try to act likewise. We may think that some are not worth God’s love, but He does not. How it works out between them and God is up to God. He is the judge, not us. Far better to use our efforts to live up to the worthiness God has placed in us, and live a life in response to Him. We can rejoice that we, and everyone else, are worth God’s infinite love.

Alison