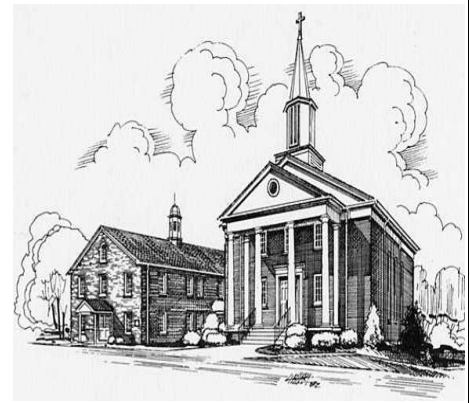


# The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

## Third Sunday of Easter

Year C  
RCL



- Acts 9:36-43
- John 10:22-30
- Psalm 23

### The Collect

o God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of  
your people: Grant that when we hear his voice we may  
know him who calls us each by name, and follow where  
he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and  
reigns, one God, for ever and ever.

**Acts 9:36-43**

NOW in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, “Please come to us without delay.” So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, get up.” Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her

up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

Psalm 23

***Dominus regit me***

- 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.

**John 10:22-30**

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one.”

## SERMON

Something happened in Judea about the year 30. Well, the truth is that a lot of things happened in Judea about the year 30. People got married, people died, children were born, lots of things happened and then they all circled the drain of history and disappeared, leaving no trace behind. Strange, isn't it, that this account of one man, this Jesus, is so brilliantly powerful two thousand years later particularly since, at the time, it wasn't much of a news item? Jesus' Facebook page would have reported only, "You have 12 followers."

When I discuss the persistence of this story with people, I'm always referred to the Resurrection and the miracle stories to explain its power but truly I wonder if that's the right approach. There was, at one time, a carnival magician who restored a dead chicken to life three times an evening with matinées on Saturday. I don't re-

call his name, but I do know the names of Jesus and Paul and Peter. To my mind, there must be something more than carnival magic behind the power of this story.

Those who refer me to the miracle stories are really telling me, “See? The miracles prove that Jesus is who he said he is.” That is a problem we don't often focus upon.

Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe.”

Why is Jesus' word not good enough? Why do we need “proof”? The verb is the problem, I think, because the verb “prove” means to persuade another than the issue in controversy “makes sense” and is acceptable within our understanding of reality. That's a mistake because God does NOT “make sense”. God is God, transcendent, and He cannot be contained within human in-

telligence. To do so limits us in ways that cripple our discipleship. Susan Howatch has one of her characters, a Bishop, say:

**To be centered entirely on the self is inevitably to be limited in one's range; to be centered on God, aligning one's own puny self with the power of the Creator, is to be open to the spiritual range of all humanity, to be in touch with the eternal, not merely the ephemeral.<sup>1</sup>**

That's just VERY well said! If we center our understanding on ourselves, we will never be able to perceive beyond our own abilities. That's profound! Limiting ourselves to that which can be “proved” to human intelligence leaves us looking for an attenuated God, one who bears no relationship to God the Creator, so when Jesus was asked for proof, He answered:

Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do

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<sup>1</sup> *Absolute Truths*, Susan Howatch



not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep.”

Those who wish to view Jesus through secular eyes, demanding proof, are destined to see nothing beyond the end of their own noses. We must look beyond miracle stories for an explanation of the power of Jesus even today. Please understand...I'm not arguing that Peter didn't raise Tabitha. I am saying that the power of Jesus, the hold this story has upon us these many years later, is more than can be accounted for by ancient stories of miracles. The literature of ancient times is awash with such stories, and none of them has the power that this one man's story evidences today. There must be more, and Jesus speaks of this “more” in this way.

My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.

I want you to attend closely to Jesus' words here.

The world in which we live is filled with myriads of voices. They are the voices of our parents, the voice of a favorite teacher, the voices of the Lone Ranger and Tonto from our childhood. All these voices compete within us for our attention. Jesus insists that we not mix His voice in with the others. That is so very difficult for us to do for the voices are so pervasive. And what do these other voices say? Are they the voices of evil? No...not necessarily. They are just other voices, the voices of our tribe.

We ate lunch in Ironton the other day. As I looked around at the other diners, a good 50% of the men were eating with a ratty camo baseball hat on their heads. Now, if a stranger declines to take his hat off when eating, that's nothing to me. I'm not harmed. But I could hardly eat for my father's voice screaming at them from inside my skull. Dad's resolute objection to eating while

wearing a hat is just one of the voices that assault me during the day. I hear the voices of my tribe telling me to fear those of another religion. I hear the voices of tolerance and intolerance that swirl and surge around me from television and my car radio and the people around me and even from my cell phone. So many voices! How am I to attend to only the One? How do I sort them out? Did Jesus say anything about wearing a hat when eating? Did He address closing the borders or gay marriage or Planned Parenthood, or any of the other screaming voices we hear today?

Your views on these issues of our time are yours. Whatever your views may be, I know that you have derived them after serious thought. But your opinions are explanation enough. You don't need to wrap Jesus around them to give them power. Indeed, we must NOT use God in that way. God is pleased to use you for His

purposes, not the other way round. Using God as a makeweight to give force to your thoughts abuses your position, and don't ever imagine that those who disagree with you don't see that. Rev. Jeremy James recently wrote:

**People don't assume that going to church makes you a hypocrite. The hypocrisy that non-churchgoers cite is the same hypocrisy that Jesus decried. The Pharisaical sort where some church goers believe they are better than the lowlifes who come in for sanctuary. The sort of hypocrisy that tells pastors to stop pushing ministry for the needy because the real focus should be on middle class and affluent families. The hypocrisy that says the pastor is too political when in reality it's that it's the wrong politics. The hypocrisy that condemns one sin from a pulpit while ignoring/hiding other sin. That's the hypocrisy people object to in church and it's that hypocrisy that drives people away. "The single greatest cause of**

**atheism in the world today is Christians who praise Jesus with their lips and deny him by their lifestyle."**

The voice of the Shepherd will tell you the life you are to live. The voice of the Judge will tell you who has the power and the glory. The voice of the Savior will tell you

Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled.

Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.

Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.<sup>2</sup>

The voice of the Shepherd leads us to live lives consistent with His teachings. Go and do, church. Go and

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 6:20-22

do.

AMEN

## BENEDICTION

In Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, he writes:

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

When you listen for the voice of God, know that it will always speak of these things.

Until we meet again,

The LORD bless you and keep you;

The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you;

The LORD lift up His face on you and give you peace.

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*Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.*

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<sup>3</sup> Galatians 5:22-23

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