

**The Lessons Appointed for  
Use on the  
Fourth 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. *Amen.*

## **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

As you are no doubt aware by now, my mind from time to time goes off on errands of its own, leaving me here to tap my foot impatiently and wait for its return. This week, as I prayed my way through the passages for this Sunday, my mind went on a little study comparing and contrasting the people and events of the First Century with those of the hippies of the 1960's. That was strange enough, all by itself, but the similarities really are remarkable.

The message of the Apostles was that our lives are not unconnected, random events. Rather, we live and move within a connected community, the creation of a being so powerful and all inclusive that He/She can't be named. Remember, "God" is not God's name. Moses learned that. "I AM who I AM" he was told. I am too holy to be confined in a word of your creation. If we get

too cozy with the word “God”, we lose something important – the awareness of the Holy. That’s why, when my mind returned from its little outing, it suggested to me that there is nothing more important for me to do this Sunday than to find a way for us to reconnect with holiness. I think there’s no better way to do that than to look at the example of the hippies of the 60’s.

The hippies of the 60’s saw themselves as members of an inclusive community, a community which would respond as a community to the needs of others, just as did the First Century church.

At that time prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over all the world; and this took place during the reign of Claudius. The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers living in Judea; this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

An inclusive community responding as a community to the needs of others. We can also see this caring community responding to the death of Dorcas in the same way we respond to death, calling their pastor to come to offer prayer and comfort:

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."



We've seen this teaching reflected in our world today in our community's response to the needs of little Calli's family and I am so proud of us. The generosity of people today in response to the horrible injuries Calli suffered echoed the principles the hippies were suggesting – “To each according to his needs; from each according to his abilities”.

Of course, when the larger community realized that those were Karl Marx's words, rather than Jesus', the hippies along with their peace and love signs and their communal living were doomed to the trash bin of history, no more than a colorful, tie-dyed footnote to cultural history. The question that is presented (and there is no more important question for us today) is, “How come that didn't happen to the First Century church?” THAT is the question I want you to engage today. “How come that didn't happen to the First Century church?”

We've ridden this old rock around the sun many times, you and I. We're old. We know how people are. Suppose some guy from Wyoming showed up in town with a story like the one the Apostles were telling. Suppose he buttonholed you and started telling you about a guy in his home town who had said

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.

Suppose he then finished his tale by telling you that his guy was executed as a criminal but rose from the dead. How would you receive that story? Here we have a small group of people, mostly from the working classes, with no political power whatsoever, who are making outrageous claims about an indisputably dead man, executed as a criminal, and rejecting the ways everyone of the time knew you were to behave. How

come we're still talking about it, 2,000 years later?

Cultures don't gladly accept change from the powerless. Ask any old hippie. Israel was part of the Roman empire, and Rome had both the mightiest army in the world and the smallest tolerance for upset and disorder. This thing **should** have gone nowhere, but in a very few years, with no army and no political power, the mighty Roman empire was defeated. The Pope now sits on Caesar's throne, you might say.

How come? Somebody comes up with an outrageous claim, particularly one that puts the majority of people hearing it in a bad light, and how does society respond – With open arms, or open hostility? How did this little group of people conquer the entire world? How is it still active and vital now, more than 2,000 years later?

The hippies weren't the only ones who tried to change the world and failed. There have been countless

attempts, all begun with the best of intentions, all now dusty footnotes to history. Thirteen hundred years BEFORE Jesus, a Pharaoh named Akhenaten decided that there was only one god. He forbade any worship of any other gods and moved the capitol of Egypt to a purpose-built city at Amarna. Ever hear of him? Of course not. After his death, his people were so offended that his monuments were dismantled and hidden, his statues were destroyed, and his name excluded from the king lists. You've heard of his son, King Tut, but that's only because his tomb was undisturbed when it was found by Howard Carter in 1922, not because of his father's failed religious coup. Even Karl Marx with his, "To each according to his needs; from each according to his abilities" was trying to make a better and more compassionate world. All these attempts now sleep in the dust. All but one.

So we're back to the beginning. Akhenaten was stricken from the king lists and erased from history. The hippies eventually went to work for Monsanto and bought Buicks. "How come that didn't happen to the First Century church?" All of human understanding cries out against it, yet here we are, 2,000 years later. How come that didn't happen to this bunch of idealists in the First Century?

My goal for today was to give you a gift – the best gift I could bestow. My goal was to disconnect you from your casual ideas of the Most Holy and replace them with the certainty of how inexplicable it is that we should be sitting here now, speaking as we are.

AMEN

## BENEDICTION

Our passage from John contains an important, though obscure, clue.

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple ...

The festival of the Dedication is Hanukkah. It celebrates the dedication of the second Temple after the miraculous return of the people to the Promised Land. John is showing us an act of power. The day is surely coming and may already be here when mankind will see no power greater than our own and no good more worthy than the salvation of ourselves and those like us. That is madness

**Abba Anthony said, “A time is coming when men will go mad, and when they see someone who is not mad, they will attack him saying, ‘You are mad, you are not like us.’”<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Cistercian Publications: 1975), 6.

I weep, church. I weep.

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

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

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