

ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER
IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN
23 E. Airy Street | Norristown PA 19401 | (610) 272-4092

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 3, 2020



HOW ARE WE DOING?

The Rev. Andrew F. Kline

ACTS 2:1-21 | PSALM 23
1 PETER 8:14-17 | JOHN 10:1-10

How are you? It is hard these days to see how we are doing, as individuals and as a church. On the one hand, in Acts, we see what practices make up the church at its best. On the other, in John, we hear Jesus paint a picture of what to look for if we are struggling to keep sight of him at work in the world. Still, in both pictures, we hold on to the promise of abundant life in Christ.

The picture of the early church in Acts is famous for its sheer energy and joy. Worship, learning, sharing and caring, it describes practices that meet every need, from wisdom to resources. It describes a strong, balanced growing spirit filled community.

“Those who had been baptized devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” Acts 2: 42-46

It seems like ages ago when we could “spend much time together”, at church, at work, at home. When we could look each other in the face, judge how we are doing, see how we are.

Even in this strange season of social distancing, I hope we have seen Christ’s people reflect this: going deeper into God’s word, inviting reflection about what really matters to us, and acting thoughtful and creatively to help a neighbor in need.

Do we know anyone going hungry? Church, we are here, serving at Soup Kitchen and collecting food for the community. Do we know anyone who is lonely? We make our calls and send our texts. We cheer them, pray for them. Church, we are here. Virtually.

What is important is not the ideal. What is important is the cheerfully possible. What do we share? What can we share?

Every day we wake up to be Christ’s hands and feet in the world. And each week, in these unprecedented times, it looks different. But one common thing remains. If we are called into the deepest sharing of each other’s lives, we will share each other’s suffering.

Indeed, to everything there is a season. it would not be too long before that rollicking party of the early church, that going back and forth from temple to home sharing everything, would be broken up, put on ice. The church would scatter. And times of persecution and difficulty would come.

And so the Apostle Peter would write his words of encouragement. Be prepared. Most of all, if you are going to share the riches of Christ, you will also share in his suffering.

The gift we bring to this pandemic is that we Christians can have a different attitude suffering. We do not need to fear it, because we

know we are not alone. Though we may be exhausted, there are no dead ends. We find a way to look at it, to share it, as bearing one another's burdens.

Jesus said: I am the Gate. I am the Door. Walk through that gate, in and out of that open door, and you will find, that the suffering and struggle you feel now, even the helplessness, transposed to a key of love. There is always a way in to the heart of Jesus, and back to green pastures and still water.

Jesus said: "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep...I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and come in and go out and find pasture... I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly." John 10:7ff

Who was he speaking to? To someone pretty much like us these days. Totally clueless. A man born blind. A man he had just healed. A man who had been disowned by his family and community. A man who then suddenly recognized who had healed him and felt the need to worship. A man who needed a quick explanation of how things really could be different.

So, Jesus used a rich metaphor to explain that we no longer have to worry about who we belong to, who family is. Shepherds are rulers, leaders and kings. But I'm a different kind of shepherd. I will always be the gate, the door, to a place you can call home.

While I am at it, I will also redefine and expand the boundaries of what will protect you. I will show you provision you can hardly dream of.

In me you can bear your suffering, and the suffering of others, with cheerfulness and creativity, because my voice wakens you to the reality and responsibilities of what lies ahead. We will discover this all together.

Perhaps the best news in these trying times is that not even false and incompetent leaders can change this equation, this promise. Sheep have their problems! But if they are listening for their shepherds voice, they will find their way home.

My friends. Do come in. Your house is my house. Here's the door.