

Easter 4, Yr.C  
Sunday, April 21, 2013  
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This has surely been a week when remembering that we belong to the Good Shepherd is needed. We pray Psalm 23, mostly, when people die. But it is a psalm (balm) for the living! Bishop Wright of Atlanta gives us words of wisdom. He says, "Just listen: guidance that erases wants, right paths for the feet, soul restoration for the weary, fear dispelling companionship, even in death's valley! Feasts in plain view of enemies and well-being that feels like a cup overflowing. Goodness and mercy not just "following us" -- that's way too passive. Actually, incredibly, "goodness and mercy pursuing us," that's the better translation."

We, the living, need Psalm 23 this week in particular. Those who have died this week at the hands of evil, on the news and around the corner, are in a place where there is "no sighing, sorrow or tears." (Revelation)

It was the feast of the Dedication (Hanukkah) and Jesus was in Jerusalem and the Jews said to him, "If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly. We can all in some way associate with the desire for plain talk. We want it from our friends, our neighbors, our teachers, our lawyers and yes even our politicians and newscasters. The trouble with talking plainly about the things of God is that the things about God are anything but plain. When I am around someone who begins to speak with unequivocal certainty about God I get nervous and pretty sure that they have gone beyond the truth to their own version of truth. Since the beginning of Christianity followers have been trying to proclaim by word the awesome power and love of God. Our Holy Scripture is filled with stories, real and mythical, that attempt to share people's experience with God and yet many of this generation are baffled by the passages we read and what they mean for them.

I have been a part of many Bible study groups where the gathered seem bent on finding out what the Bible means. The mind set in most Bible studies is not that Holy Scripture invites us to participate and experience rich stories with multiple meanings, but rather that the message from the good book can be decoded if only we have enough faith.

Jesus says to those gathered...I have told you, the works I do in my Father's name testify to me...but you do not believe.

Plainly speaking Jesus can not be explained with words but Jesus must be experienced. The image of the sheep and the shepherd becomes a helpful image for understanding this. The sheep

know and trust the shepherd, not because they have gone through any rational intellectual discernment but because they have experienced the shepherd's work.

I am not suggesting we stop all Bible studies or reading scripture or seeking a more intellectual understanding of God. We are to love the Lord with all our heart, our soul and all our mind. Sadly I have only seen and experienced that arguing about who believes the right things about God has proven to be just as deadly as evil and usually keeps good people from simply walking in God's ways.

A highly skilled physician who treats AIDS patients keeps a picture of her grandmother in her home. Every morning before leaving for the hospital she sits quietly before the picture.

Once when she was small, her kitten was killed in an accident. It was her first experience with death and she was devastated. Her mom and dad tried to tell her not to be sad, saying, "your kitten is now in heaven with God." But too little Louisa this did not bring any comfort. She prayed asking God to give her kitten back. But God did not answer.

In her anguish she turned to her grandmother. Why? She asked. Her grandmother lifted her up and held her close. She did not tell her that her kitten was with God. Instead she reminded her of the time when grandpa died. She didn't know why either. She prayed, but God did not bring Grandpa back. Louisa turned into the soft warmth of her grandmother's shoulder and sobbed. At one point, she turned to see her grandmother crying too.

Although her grandmother could not answer her question, a great loneliness was lifted and Louisa felt able to move on.

"My grandmother was a lap... a place of refuge." Louisa remembers. I know a great deal about AIDS but what I really want to be for my patients is a lap, a place from which they can face what they have to face and not be alone.

We, the living, need to remember this week: evil is cold, vigilant, desperate and lurking. Evil, though it rages, has already lost. Evil had minutes in Boston and in countless places around the world this week, but I have seen so much more good this week, countless individuals from first responders to strangers in the street that provided a lap of refuge and good works in the name of God, that tell me with their works that forever belongs to God.