

## **Weekly Reading – Monday, April 19, 2010**

The focus here are the lessons for next Sunday, April 25, 2010, which is the fourth Sunday of Easter. It is also traditionally "Good Shepherd Sunday," with the Gospel coming from John ("I am the Good Shepherd") 10, and the Psalm being Psalm 23. Easter IV is also a kind of transition from resurrection stories to stories that prepare the church for Pentecost.

### **Acts 9: 36 - 43**

The account of Peter raising Tabitha/ Dorcas from death. What we are told about Tabitha is that she was a believer, "devoted to good works," particularly among "the widows." It is "the widows" who are gathered in grief when Peter arrives, each of them bearing or wearing some piece of clothing that Tabitha had made for them. So this community of "the widows" is a community of the least and the vulnerable, without much resource or clout. They are knit together by love and Tabitha has been a key knitter. Death has taken from them the person on whom many depended. Remember that death, here, will not be thought of as only physical death/ mortality, but as a power or a dominion, ruling a fallen world. In that sense, it is the same power that has made the widows so vulnerable and marginal already. Death has defined and consigned them. (See the film "Water," by the Indian director to understand the place and role of widows in traditional society). Peter is a "prophet-like-Jesus" who carries on Jesus' assault on death's power at work in the world. He called her to life again. Note the conclusion, "many believed in the Lord." It was not about Peter, but about the power of the Risen Christ. Story after story in Acts is a resurrection story as death's dominion is contested and destroyed. Where in our communities is death's power holding forth, distorting and disfiguring life? Go there.

### **Revelation 7: 9 - 17**

Over at the "What's Tony Thinking?" page I commented on contemporary preaching suggesting that something to pay attention to is whether sermons are theological, meaning do they put God at the center and bring the congregation into the presence of God? My argument is that too many sermons today are mainly about us, about human beings, and not enough about God. Well, that's not the case here, or anywhere in Revelation. The focus is clearly on God, the praise of God (even in the midst of trial and persecution, then being experienced by the church). So verse 12, "Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

This is "praise music" of the best kind, and the kind we need to be caught up in more in worship than we might, in Wesley's phrase, "be lost in wonder, praise and love" for the Lamb at the center of the throne, who will be their shepherd, and who will guide them to springs of the water of life." (vs. 17). Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

### **John 10: 22 - 30**

All of Chapter 10 of John is governed by the metaphor of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. This particular lection notes a Jerusalem setting, which in John always denotes controversy and tends to have the cross in view. So Jesus is in Jerusalem in the portico of the Temple when "the Jews," meaning religious leaders who are suspicious of him and against him, ask why he doesn't tell them plainly if he is the Messiah or not, as if it were a matter of completing a blank on an application form. Jesus says that it is not more information they need but more relation, or relationship. Only those who participate in relationship with Jesus, who trust and follow him, are able to grasp who he is and the meaning of his "works" or signs. There is a certain circularity to this argument. Still, there is a profound spiritual point. We do not come to know God by accumulating information, evidence or proof, and then deciding. We come to know God by trusting him, by giving ourselves, by listening, by following. Faith is, to put it another way, not something we "get," but something that we are "given."