

Lectionary Guides for Acts 2:42-47 and John 10:1-10

Acts 2:42-47

Our short passage sums up what happened after Peter's first and second sermons. The Apostles (Jewish Christians) felt awe and gladness, broke bread (regular food and Holy Communion), said prayers, sold their possessions and goods in order to distribute the proceeds to those in need, spent more time in the Temple, and "saved" newcomers.

Ten Questions

1. In both the Jewish, Jewish-Christian and Christian traditions the breaking of bread was and is central. Every Sabbath Friday in their homes observant Jews light candles and give thanks to God, the Ruler of the Universe, for bread and wine. Jewish-Christians in Acts also "broke bread at home." Christians today, whether Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant also break bread together as Holy Communion. What was one time when this ritual breaking of bread was particularly important to you?
2. It was said that Jesus performed "signs and wonders." What were some of them?
3. Here it says that the Apostles performed many "wonders and signs," which caused "awe" among them and their growing community. What were these? Are there any of these that we in our tradition still value and celebrate? Have you ever been the agent of any of these?
4. Acts says [the apostles] had "all things in common" ...they sold possessions and goods for the needy. The early Christian community seemed to be very communal, egalitarian, non-materialistic and caring of the needy. Is our church similar? Can we name examples of our church raising funds and aiding the poor? Can we name examples of us and our families raising funds and giving it to those in need?
5. After giving funds to the needy, how do we feel? What might we have we learned? Did it move us to follow up in any way?
6. Acts says that [the apostles] spent much time together in the Temple. In other words, these Jewish-Christians returned to their [old] Temple to worship. How does this seem to us? What does this show about the early Christian (inter-testamental) community?
7. Can we share personal examples of inter-religious, interfaith, practice? How did we feel about participating in them? If our church says that we are welcoming, how might we express an openness to other denominations or faith traditions?
8. Luke says that they broke bread with "glad and generous hearts." As we pointed out last Sunday, Luke liked to use the word, "heart," to describe times of deep feeling. After a

common meal or Holy Communion, have we experienced similar feelings of gladness, generosity, joy and fullness? Can you describe them?

9. Do we agree that when we bring people to Christ we are “saving” them (v. 47b)? Saving them from what? Or might we be “teaching” them? Any differences? What does salvation mean to us?

10. During our health pandemic, does this lection have any particular meaning for you? Or does it seem alien or irrelevant to our concerns and cares?

Copyright Rev. Dianne E. Arakawa, 5.3.20.

John 10:1-10

The Fourth Evangelist places this narrative after the healing of the blind man, his worshipping Jesus, and the Pharisees rejecting Jesus the healer. In this narrative, John describes Christ as the Gatekeeper, the Shepherd, the Good Shepherd. It was a powerful image for a leader in Graeco-Roman and Jewish literature, though not all shepherds were good. For example, in the Hebrew Bible, God is described as the shepherd of Israel and Israel as God’s sheep in Ezekiel 34:1-31; as the Good Shepherd in Psalm 23; and David is depicted as a shepherd king in I Samuel 16:6-13.

According to agrarian practice, many houses had an attached, enclosed pasture for sheep, constructed of stones, which was only entered by a gate. So valuable were the sheep that there was also a gatekeeper, who worked with the shepherd and watched over the sheep at night. This intimate and trusted interrelationship between the shepherd and his sheep was special: the shepherd called out to his flock, and the sheep recognized his voice! Verse 9 includes Jesus’ description, “I am the gate;” and later “I am... the bread, the truth, the light, the way.” Life (Hebrew, *zoe*), abundant life, is what God wishes for us, too, as members of Christ’s flock.

Ten Questions

1. Understanding that the shepherd was a well-known image for leader, we can imagine why Jesus was identified as a Shepherd, later the Good Shepherd. Describe some of the qualities of the ancient shepherd that fit Christ’s relationship with us.
2. Today in our non-agrarian nation, we still have shepherds, including for instance in Navajo country in Arizona. Do we (still) consider the shepherd to be a strong leader, who goes in front of the sheep, takes care of them, and does not leave them? What do we think constitutes an outstanding leader in our society?
3. John says that the true shepherd comes through the gate, rather than climbs over to confuse or harm. Apparently, even then there were ways, best practices if you will, that

were observed. Have we seen leaders, who try to subvert or short-cut healthy boundaries? Name an example that we might have of this. How can we best respond to such behavior?

4. Both the gatekeeper and the sheep recognize the shepherd for the safety and well-being of the sheep and the ranchers, whose livelihood depends on the sheep. The sheep recognize him/her by physique, gait, gestures and voice! How important are voices to us in identifying and trusting individuals?

5. This shepherd calls his sheep each by name. Do we think that shepherds probably still do this at large ranches? What does it mean that the shepherd understood that each sheep was different, each had their own personality, each should have their own individual names? Have we ever imagined that God sees us separately, can distinguish our differences, and knows our personal names?

6. How are names important? Do we recall a time when someone-- a classmate, a teacher, a colleague-- called us by the wrong name or spelled our name incorrectly, for whatever reason? How did we feel? Have we ever made a mistake in calling someone by the wrong name? When we have, how did we feel then?

7. Jesus says "I am the gate" for the sheep. Other than John's image of Jesus as the gate, have we ever thought of Jesus as a gate? What are the characteristics of a gate? In best practices, we sometimes say that someone needs to serve as a gatekeeper to support healthy boundaries in group process. How might this be similar to the meaning in this passage?

8. If the pasture within the walls and gate is secure, who are the thieves and bandits described? How might they not only have tried to steal the sheep? In our lives, who might we imagine to be thieves and bandits, who try to capture, take or destroy what is not rightly theirs?

9. Jesus said, "whoever enters by me will be saved." (v. 9) What does this mean? Recalling Acts 2: 47b (earlier), what does it mean to be "saved"?

10. Jesus said, I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (v. 10b) What does it mean to have life? What does it mean to have *abundant* life? During this global health crisis, how do we interpret having life...having Christ's abundant life?

Copyright Rev. Dianne E. Arakawa, 5.3.20