

Sermon for 5/12/19  
Easter 4C

In today's Gospel, Jesus was walking along a part of the Temple Mount that was called Solomon's Portico, a long walkway on the Eastern side.

It would have been a natural place for him to stroll if he wanted to spend time in that holy place without actively participating in the busyness of the Temple.

In Jesus' time, the walkway was defined by columns and a roof of some sort.

The walkway is still there today even though the columns are long gone.

It's relatively isolated from the Dome of the Rock and the other buildings that are on the Mount and it's still a good place to stroll quietly, to think, and even to pray.

In my mind's eye I can see Jesus walking along, lost in his thoughts when a few people approach him to ask – a bit privately – if he were the Messiah.

In John's Gospel, just a little before today's passage, Jesus tells his listeners that he is the Good Shepherd.

Here, he continues that metaphor and simply says, "My sheep hear my voice.

I know them, and they follow me.

I give them eternal life and they will never perish."

It's a simple statement on his part, not a brag, not a triumphant proclamation, just a simple answer to the question that was asked.

Jesus ended his answer by saying, "The Father and I are one."

To our ears, it sounds like a rather modest declaration on his part.

After all, we know all about the resurrection, we know that Jesus is the Son of God.

And so we miss the power of what it is that he had to say: this man, strolling along the east side of the Temple Mount told the people around him that he was able to give people eternal life because he and God were one.

His listeners didn't miss what an incredible claim this was; if we read the next verse in John's Gospel, a verse not included in today's Gospel reading we hear, "The Jews took up stones again to stone him."

To them it was absolute blasphemy to hear Jesus say, "The Father and I are one."

Jesus helped them parse his statement theologically so that they put down their stones, but the power of what he was saying is undeniable.

Or is it?

After all, we've become familiar with Jesus' message; it's like a comfortable sweater that we can wrap around ourselves when we need a little bit of reassurance.

But were any of you astonished at this passage when I read it a few minutes ago?

You might have noticed that it mentions something about sheep and connected it with the imagery in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm that we read today – Jesus is our Lord and shepherd who leads us through the valley into eternal life.

How nice.

How reassuring to know that Jesus Christ, the Son of God is looking out for us.

Don't you think that we've lost some of the passion of our faith, some of the power, some of the ability to be awestruck by God?

That's not the case with the John the Divine, the author of the Book of Revelation.

He had a series of visions while in exile on the island of Patmos, visions that delighted in the promise of life with God.

"All the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.'"

"They are before the throne of God ... They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

That vision is our Christian hope.

That vision is what directs our sight away from the troubles that we face and toward the promised Kingdom of God.

*The Rev. Kent D. Rahm  
Trinity Episcopal Church, Fredericksburg, VA  
Sermon for 5/12/19 Easter 4C*

Let's be honest; Do you have any idea as to what eternal life will be?  
Do you have a personal vision of what it will mean to live forever, to enter life with God after we end our mortal life?  
Neither do I.  
I don't particularly expect wings, streets paved with gold, or incessant, never-ending harp music.  
All I know is what I read in the Bible: I expect that – somehow – I will be with God and that – somehow – I will be with other people.  
I'm glad that John's vision of a place beyond suffering, beyond human limitations can point me toward a reality of being with God.  
And, whenever I read that passage myself, I want to read it quickly so that the power of the vision becomes overwhelming and clear: life with God will be good.

That vision is something that can lift our hearts in the middle of our daily lives.  
When we feel burdened with the troubles and difficulties of our lives, it helps to have a vision of the time to come, a vision that can sustain us when we need the help.  
It is a vision that can shepherd us closer to God, that can remind us how we might live today as if our new life were already here.

One image of eternal life that has always meant a great deal to me is that of the heavenly banquet, the feast that we will share in our new life with God.  
It's a meal that is open to everyone, a meal that we *all* share together, a meal that fills our hearts and souls with the love of God, a meal that is so perfect, so right that all we can do is say, "Thank you, Lord; thank you."

And we are blessed to have the special meal that we share each week.  
It's the meal that feeds our souls in ways that we don't begin to understand.  
It's the meal that Jesus gave us so that we might gather with our brothers and sisters in Christ in faith and put our trust in the Lord.  
Of course, it's communion, the bread and the wine, the body and the blood, the sacrament given by Jesus Christ for our nourishment in faith that brings us forgiveness of sin, union with God in Christ and each other, and points us clearly toward that heavenly banquet.  
Orthodox Christians have a wonderful phrase that they frequently use: they'll say that something is "a holy mystery."  
And that's what communion is: something that we do together that puts us into the presence of God in ways that we can only begin to understand.  
It's our weekly reminder that, as a church, we are not simply a group of friends who gather, but that we are people claimed by God and destined for glory.  
Communion is a meal that we should eat regularly yet never lose the ability to be astonished by what God has done, what God is doing, and what God will do for us.

Jesus Christ is our Good Shepherd, guiding us, leading us, feeding us, and caring for us.  
Today – and every day – may we be overwhelmed with his love and his power and his tenderness.  
We can hear his voice and, with each other's support, encouragement, and faith, we can follow him into life with God.

*The Rev. Kent D. Rahm  
Trinity Episcopal Church, Fredericksburg, VA  
Sermon for 5/12/19 Easter 4C*