

## Homily for Good Shepherd Sunday

The Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year C, RCL. Revelation 7:9-17. Psalm 23. John 10:22-30. April 17, 2016. The Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance in the Episcopal Diocese of Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

How many images of the Good Shepherd, luminous in stained glass over the altars of our churches, show Jesus as noble and warmly serene, surrounded by devoted sheep and often carrying a snuggly lamb!

There is nothing wrong with us portraying Jesus as adorable, as long as we realize that the Bible does not typically portray him that way. Earnest and loving, yes, but also stern and tough-minded. The images of the Good Shepherd collected in today's psalm, New Testament reading and Gospel give the context: the world is dangerous, indeed it is a spiritual battleground. God offers his sheep some guidance and protection, but he also leads them through hostile territory, and some of them will take damage.

But he will not lose any, not one sheep (John 10:28-29), and he will mend their suffering. In one of the most wonderful and reassuring passages in Holy Scripture, today's reading from Revelation ends by assuring that God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Revelation 7:17) Salvation is not avoidance of the great conflict between God and those forces hostile to him; salvation is the promise that we, God's flock, will come through it and be renewed.

The reason we need peaceful reassurance, the reason we need the classic Good Shepherd stained glass window or painting or statue, is that we feel the heat and weight and slash of the rolling catastrophe that is our existence every day, some days barely at all, some days fit to overwhelm us. God, merciful and strong to save, gives us the gentle Jesus. But the Jesus who went to the cross, who spoke tough words as needed, who faced hostile people who in the end had their way with him, is as worthy of our contemplation as the sweet shepherd. It is the ruler of all creation, unimaginably potent and precise in his glory, unimaginably willing to be as vulnerable as the thieves hung up on either side of his cross, who will wipe every tear from your eye and mine. Just like a good mommy or daddy or brother or sister or friend or spouse or nurse. Or shepherd. For Jesus and the Father are one (John 10:30), and the Spirit misses nothing: no falling sparrow, no wounded sheep, no crying child, no stricken grown-up. It is the will of the Life and Light beyond and within all that exists to comfort, to raise up, with a strong hand, on the morning beyond all tears.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Weeping may spend the night, but joy comes with the morning. (Psalm 30:5)