

Fourth Sunday of Easter

John 10:22-30

“Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe.’” (vs.25) Jesus’ teachings and His Person were and are unique in all of history. All other religions are man-imagined and none offer the world a God Who loves His creation enough to die in its behalf and then give the purchased salvation to man with no strings attached. There are no works to be done by men in order to gain God’s favor. There are no frailty-filled gods who argue over man’s fate. There is no barrier between men and God; only a Bridge Who has made us God’s own people. Those who challenged Jesus to “...tell us plainly” had already chosen not to believe because Jesus did not fit their idea of what God must be like. The same problem continues today.



Jesus chose to become true man, one of us. He did this, not just to condemn our behavior, but to invite us into a full understanding of who He is! That understanding could have meant our destruction, but instead He offered Himself as the Sacrifice for our failures. His free gift to us is eternal and abundant life in His presence. Only Jesus offers the world this God-created solution to sin. Only Christianity is based in God’s power instead of man’s power.

Out of His great love for the world, and only through Himself, Jesus offers mankind an intensely personal relationship with God. How personal is this relationship for each one of us, whether man or woman, child or adult, pastor or layperson? Jesus’ words tell it best:

“My sheep hear My voice and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”

Get to know your Father. Join a Bible study group.

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

Fourth Sunday of Easter

John 10:22-30

1. What festival provided the context for Jesus’ words (vs. 22)? See the Concordia Self Study Bible note or a commentary for more information on this feast. What contemporary Jewish festival continues this celebration?

2. What “proof” of His Messiahship had Jesus offered? (vs. 25)

3. According to vs. 26-27, who are Jesus’ sheep?

4. According to vs. 30, what is the relationship between Jesus and the Father? How are they “one”?



5. What assurances do verses 28-29 give to you?

6. This is “Good Shepherd Sunday.” See the Introit and Collect of the Day (LW, p. 52). What does it mean for you that Jesus is the Shepherd and you are one of His sheep?

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 6:1-9, 7:2, 51-60

Stephen is called the first Christian martyr. A modern observer might say that he brought his death upon himself. We live in an age of self awareness and self preservation. We are cautious about the circumstances that we allow ourselves to be in, and we try to think before we act or speak. Stephen, on the other hand, seemed to lose all sense of reality! He was already standing in the middle of a dangerous crowd, but instead of staying quiet, he talked and then yelled himself into an unwinnable situation. Why?

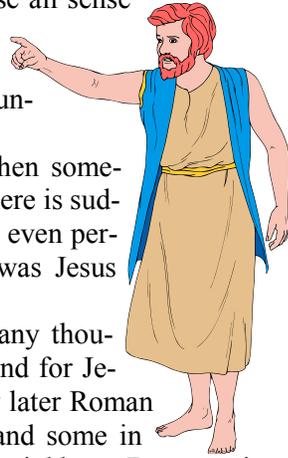
In the lives of many there comes a time when something happens that supercedes all *self* thought. There is suddenly something more important than comfort or even personal well-being. For Stephen that something was Jesus Christ and His truth.

Over the centuries since Stephen's death many thousands of Christians have been called upon to stand for Jesus in the face of death. Some were executed by later Roman emperors, others fell during the Middle Ages, and some in World War II for daring to protect their Jewish neighbors. During the days of power for the Soviet Union, the church had to move underground, or be destroyed, and many Christian died as they refused to deny Jesus. Today the struggle goes on around the world, from China to the Sudan to the Middle East to India, etc. People of many different nationalities have had to make the same decision as Stephen—"Is Jesus worth my life?"

There was nothing special about Stephen. He was just a servant in the church. In doing God's work, he found himself under attack by men who didn't want to see the church survive. Christ's Church is still under attack by those who don't want to see it survive, even after two thousand years. Just as Jesus was attacked for His actions of love, so is His Church. Can we point the way to Christ, even in the face of hatred? We can, by the power of the Holy Spirit!

Try a family Bible study!

(A message from your District Education Committee)



Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 6:1-9, 7:2, 51-60

1. Who are "the Twelve"? (See Acts 1:12 ff. for the story of Judas' replacement; see Matthew 10:2-4 for a listing) What was to be the primary role of the Apostles? (6:2,4)
2. What were the qualifications for "the seven"? How do these qualifications apply to church leaders today?
3. How do we hear "Law" in Stephen's message? (7:51-53) What is the response to the Law?
4. Does Stephen's prayer remind us of a similar petition? (Luke 23:34) Could you offer this petition in a similar circumstance?
5. What does Stephen "see" in his glimpse of heaven? (7:55-56) How do you picture heaven?
6. How is the early church organized for outreach and action? What can we learn from them?



Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 4:23-33

Peter and John had just come from standing before the Sanhedrin court of the Jews. This was the same court that had condemned Jesus and demanded that Pilate crucify Him. Peter and John boldly proclaimed to them that they would continue to preach Christ even though the Jews forbade it.

Today's reading tells the story of the apostles' return and their report to the other believers. Together the group prayed that God would continue to strengthen them in proclaiming the Gospel in the face of danger and rejection. What does this mean for us today?

Many of us have been advised that there are two topics that you should not discuss—politics and religion, since either can cause arguments and even broken friendships. Maybe that's one reason that we now see another cultural "norm" being taught. Now our world thinks that there is not even such a thing as "truth" - no true religion; no true morality; no true values. Truth is whatever each person wants to believe. Almost like the Jews that questioned Peter and John, our own world has its own definition of truth (there isn't any) and ridicules, and even tries to suppress, any other view.

Can you imagine if Peter and John had been told that they could not say that Jesus was the way, the truth, and the life because no one idea could be considered the only truth? Yet we are being told that today. Some Christians know that it isn't true, but choose not to fight the battle. Sadly, some Christians accept the statement and believe that there are many ways to God and that Jesus just happens to be right for them. There is a great need for us to proclaim the Gospel even to our Christian friends. We are all in the midst of a mistaken world that demands obedience, just like the early believers.

The Bible says that "all" of the Christians (not just the apostles, not just the pastors) gathered began to speak out boldly. We are all ministers of the Gospel. We are all enabled by Christ to be true to Him.



Is your Bible study group serving in God's world?

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 4:23-33

1. What was the message of the early church? (vs. 33) What is the example for the church today?
2. According to vs. 27 how broad was the opposition to Jesus?
3. What were the signs that God had heard and answered the prayer of the church? (vs. 31)
4. How was the faith of the believers made visible? (vs. 32) See also Acts 2:44-45. How do we model this response in our own settings and culture?
5. What word describes the energy and passion of the Easter proclaimers in vs. 29 and 31? How can we witness more boldly?
6. There were threats and obstacles which attempted to stymie the message of the apostles. What threats and obstacles do we face today? What power and assurance is also ours?



Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 13:15-16; 23-33

It was during Paul's first missionary journey to the Gentiles that today's story occurred. Paul and his companion, Barnabas, were well into the trip, having already preached the gospel on the island of Cyprus, in the city of Perga, and throughout the countryside from there to the city of Antioch in Pisidia (far to the northwest of their home city of the same name). John Mark, a younger companion of the two, had found the journey too much of a challenge and had left for home. As today's passage opens, Paul has just reminded his listeners in the synagogue of God's promise to them of a Savior. He had been invited, as was the custom concerning visiting teachers, to expound on the day's reading of the Law.

Paul's purpose in his reference to those who had wanted Jesus' death was not to condemn them, but to point out that their actions, though unintended as such, were in fulfillment of the prophecies of Messiah. He concludes his words concerning the death of Jesus with, "But God raised Him from the dead." Paul added the assurance that Jesus appeared to His followers after His resurrection and that those who proclaimed the event were eye witnesses of its truth.

Today some claim that whether Jesus was resurrected bodily or just spiritually really doesn't matter, but Paul would strenuously argue against that opinion. Paul knew that the resurrection was the proof that God's gift of salvation to mankind through the sacrifice of His Son was real. Paul once said that "...if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins." (1 Cor. 15:17) The resurrection of Jesus may not be "reasonable" to many, but God doesn't limit His actions to what people can understand. If He did, the world would be in far more trouble than it is! As we journey through the Easter season, it is a joyful assurance to know that God not only sent Jesus to die for the sins of us all, He raised Jesus from the dead and brought Him forth from the tomb so that we could know for sure that it is all true!



Celebrate Christ's resurrection—join a Bible study!
(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 13:15-16; 23-33

1. The context of Paul's message was familiar. Read 13:14-15. When were they meeting? Where were they meeting? What words were the "text" for the sermon?

2. Where's the Easter proclamation in Paul's message?

3. Does Paul excuse the actions of those who condemned Jesus? (vs. 27) How was God at work in their ignorance and arrogance?

4. How does Paul make the message (and the blessings) personal for his audience?

5. Paul quotes the Old Testament in vs. 33 (Psalm 2:7-9). How do we find the Easter message in the Old Testament?

6. Paul repeatedly emphasizes "for us" and "our." How do you know that Jesus rose for you? What is the significance of Jesus' resurrection for you?



Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 6:1-9; 7:2, 51-60

Stephen was the first recorded martyr for the faith recorded in the New Testament. Like many Christians to follow him, he found himself in what we might call a “lose-lose” situation. Though he was a good man filled with the Holy Spirit and a heart for others, Stephen had enemies. These enemies were opposed to him for one reason—he was a follower of and a witness for Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. In fact, “martyr” in Greek meant “witness.”

During his “trial” Stephen realized that there was no hope for him against his enemies. They had already decided that he must die, regardless of the truth he spoke and lived. Stephen courageously chose to keep on speaking the truth until they would allow it no longer. His judges were enraged and to think of their acts against him as horrendous does not overstate the fact.

Do you want to die just because you tell others about Jesus? Neither did Stephen, but it was a choice that he made courageously. There are those in the world today who make the same choice. Christ’s followers are not immune to persecution even in our modern, tolerant world.

Most of us will never face death for our faith like Stephen, but there are some things that we can consider as we live each day. Do we shy away from telling a friend about our faith for fear of ridicule? Does Jesus excuse us from reaching out to others with His love? Should we refrain from telling someone about Jesus’ love if we think they don’t want to hear? Is there a proper time for the “law” that Stephen preached? How can we be sure that the Holy Spirit is directing our actions and witness?

These are questions that should be on our minds daily. It’s easy to get so involved in our own lives that we forget that we have a mission from our Lord. We are to reach the lost with the word that there is hope—and the lost are all around us. They are in our neighborhoods, towns, and workplaces. On our own we are ineffective and hesitant witnesses, but the Holy Spirit guides us to the persons who need us and fills us with understanding, compassion, and the right words. With His help we will not fail to please our Father.

Learn more about God’s mercy and love in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee.

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 6:1-9; 7:2, 51-60

Exploring the Text:

1. What ministry needs necessitated the appointment of the apostolic assistants? Who were the seven assistants?
2. How is Stephen described in Acts 6:5,8, 9? What must it have been like to be around Stephen?
3. Why did some oppose Stephen? What was Stephen’s fate? What was Stephen’s final witness?
4. Who is introduced in Acts 7:58? How will he become a significant part of the rest of the Book of Acts?

Family Table Talks:

5. Read Acts 6:7. What are we doing in our family and in our church to make sure that the word of God spreads?
6. Are we sometimes ridiculed or persecuted for sharing Jesus? What can we learn from Stephen?

Fourth Sunday of Easter

1 John 3:1-2

Earlier in this letter, John warns his flock about the deceivers in the world trying to destroy the faith. Just as today, Satan was working tirelessly to confuse, tempt, and conquer believers. Many early Christians may have wondered if perhaps they were wrong after all. Was their faith misplaced? Why was the world so antagonistic if Jesus really was the man and God that believers thought He was? If believers were right with God, why didn't life go more smoothly?

John calls the scoffers and persecutors "antichrists." Even some who had been in the church were now saying that Jesus really was not the Christ. They tried to convince others with cajoling, demanding or taunts. John says that unrighteousness in the world must be expected since those who love the world more than God cannot understand Him or His children. They cannot live in the Light brought to the world in Jesus because they are trapped in darkness. These are the deceivers that trouble the church and her members.

In today's verses John continues his teaching with a reassurance to anyone who is troubled by the frustrations and unbelief that confront them daily. Though the world does not understand it, we are the children of God. He has "lavished" His love on us. Even when we see only trouble, He is there and He does care. The hope that we lay on Him (a good translation would be "this hope *fixed* on Him" —vs.3) cannot fail. In this season of Easter we read John's reminder that "when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is."

Our "fixation" on Jesus is good and pure. It is not hopeless but hope-guaranteed by God. The world goes its own way while we are struggling within it, trying to be like Jesus while others ask us "Why?" God confirms His promise that we are righteous in His sight through the blood of His Son. We know it is true, not because our friends in the world approve, but because Jesus really did walk out of the tomb!

Learn more about Jesus and the empty tomb in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Fourth Sunday of Easter

1 John 3:1-2

1. The text celebrates a family relationship. God is the _____ and we are the _____.
How did we get to be part of such a special family relationship?
2. The NIV text says God has "lavished" his love on us. What does this word mean? Check other translations for other descriptive verbs for God's action.
3. According to vs. 2, what will happen when Jesus appears? What will we see? When will we see Him and be like Him?

For Family Reflection

4. What does it mean for you to be a child of God?
5. Do your friends and neighbors know that you are a child of God (vs. 1b)? How can your family share with them by your words and actions that Jesus is risen?
6. "Child" or "children" is a common title in this short letter. Skim the five chapters of the book and count the number of times that we find these words. What does this expression say about John's feelings toward the readers?

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Revelation 7:9-17

The empty tomb proclaimed the risen Christ and His victory over sin. He gained that victory for us, not for Himself. He was perfect in every way, yet He suffered for us so that our sin would not keep us from Him. In today's passage John describes a scene of worship in heaven in which we see our changed selves. We see those whom Jesus' victory has saved.

John says that in addition to the angelic beings surrounding the throne of God, there is a great multitude of those who have died and now reside in heaven. They are what we will be and also reflect what we now are.

John says that they are robed in white. Their white robes signify that they have been washed clean of all sin by the blood of the Lamb shed on the cross. We are changed. Even now our lives are no longer clothed in the dirt of sin, but in the forgiveness given us. We are new each day and able to walk by God's love, not dependent upon our own power.

The saints in John's vision serve God day and night, and we also are called to serve Him—now, in this world. We are able to serve Him because of who our Master is and what He can do in our lives.

In John's vision those already in heaven are provided for by their Lord. They will not hunger, or thirst, or suffer any more, *“for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life”* (vs. 17). While this is the perfect vision that will become reality in heaven, Jesus assures us that His care has already begun, just as His calling to us to be His servants has already come to us.

John shows us the perfect glory of heaven, but also reminds us that God's care is not limited to our eternity after this life. We now enjoy partly what we will enjoy fully in heaven. Like the saints and martyrs before us, our life as God's children begins with our adoption into His kingdom and continues through eternity.

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A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Revelation 7:9-17

1. The text begins “After this . . .” Look at the first eight verses of Revelation 7. What had John just witnessed in his vision? What is the significance of the listing of 12 tribes and the 144,000?
2. What is the significance of the white robes? According to vs. 14, why were the robes white?
3. According to vs. 15-17, what will heaven be like?
4. How does vs. 10 emphasize that we have no role in our salvation? Who alone is the source of salvation? How does that salvation become ours?

For Family Reflection

5. The “whiteness” of the heavenly scene is emphasized. What is the liturgical color of the Easter season? When and where is “white” part of our worship setting? When have you worn white as part of worship? Why will we wear white in heaven?
6. According to vs. 9 what will bring nations, tribes, peoples and languages together? Why is Easter a mission season in the church? What mission action can you take as a family or as a church?

Fourth Sunday of Easter

John 10:1-10

Jesus tells the disciples a very simple truth. His sheep will follow Him because they know His voice. They will not follow the voice of a stranger.

You may already know that sheep aren't too bright. Jesus compares us to sheep in relationship to the loving Shepherd. He knows us. We are inconsistent, easily distracted, frequently greedy, often rebellious, and generally obstinate. Maybe that is why He makes it so simple for us—just know His voice and listen to Him.

Jesus says that there is great danger if we fail to listen to His voice. “Thieves and robbers” will come “only to steal, and kill, and destroy.” If we drift from the Shepherd, we will be destroyed. Our own greed might be our demise, or false worship of self or society, or power, or a cult, or a myriad of other things.

To be strong and safe, we must follow the Shepherd. To follow the Shepherd, we must know His voice. To know His voice, we must know Him.

This learning to recognize Jesus' voice becomes ever more important in our world. Author Dan Kimball says that part of the reason that Christians are unpopular and misunderstood is that our non-churchgoing friends don't understand why we can't tell them more about Jesus. They want us to converse with them about Jesus, but most of us cannot. To share more fully with them why we think it is a marvelous joy to be a lowly sheep in the hands of the Master Shepherd requires that we learn to hear the Shepherd clearly.

It's time for us to take the first steps to a deeper understanding of our Shepherd. The Holy Spirit will guide us, answer many of our questions, and enable us to better understand. Commitment to Bible study, prayer, and worship may bring ridicule from some people that we would like to impress. Satan will give us a dozen reasons to give up every time we pick up a Bible. But there are those in our lives who want to know more about our faith, and they are also ones whom Jesus wants to bring into His precious flock.

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Fourth Sunday of Easter

John 10:1-10

1. How is Jesus like a gate for the sheep (vs. 7, 9)?
2. What was the objective of the thief? What/who are some of the spiritual thieves attaching “lambs” today?
3. What is the significance of the Shepherd's voice (3-5; 27)? What does it mean for you that the Shepherd knows your name? When do you hear His voice?
4. What does it mean to have a full life (vs. 10)? What's the difference between life in the world and a full life in Jesus?

For Family Reflection

5. Do you have a picture of Jesus the Shepherd in your church or in your home? Why is it comforting to picture Jesus as your Shepherd?
6. Read or sing “I Am Jesus' Little Lamb” (LSB #740) or another “Shepherd” song.

Fourth Sunday of Easter

John 10:11-18

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus died one time as payment for the sins of all. That onetime payment was enough to make atonement for all the sinners of history. Yet, there is a yearning on my part to ask my Shepherd, “Lord, how often did your death save me from a wolf?” I think He will put His hand on my shoulder, smile quietly at me and say, “Day after day after day.”

That is not to say that God takes sin lightly. He does not, but He keeps me from succumbing to the temptations of the world, over and over again. I am weak, but He is the strength that keeps me from harm and from the wiles of Satan.

Jesus says in today’s passage that unlike a hired shepherd, He is our Owner, and will not be driven away from us. He will not flee from us, no matter what assails us. How can we know this? How can we know not to fear that He will leave us the next time we fail to follow His will? He has already proven it.

Just think of all the times that Jesus could have chosen to leave us. He chose to come to earth as a man, not to stay on His heavenly throne. He chose to give up part of His power in order to live as we live. When Satan confronted Him in the wilderness, Jesus chose to walk toward the cross, rather than bow to Satan’s temptations. Throughout His ministry, Jesus saw us for the unloving rebels that we really are, yet He continued to walk toward the cross. He wept over Jerusalem and her rebellious leaders, yet He entered the city. At Gethsemane, He pleaded with His Father, knowing exactly what awaited Him, but chose to walk toward the cross for us. As our fellow men pounded nails through His wrists and feet, He allowed it. He stayed on the cross and died, when He could have come down from the cross and demanded that we each pay in full for our sin. He allowed Himself to be separated from the Father and the Spirit as punishment for sin that He never committed.

Jesus has already shown us that He will never leave us. He is the Shepherd that loves the sheep beyond our comprehension. We can rest in His arms.

Let God’s Word bless you in a special way this Easter season.

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Fourth Sunday of Easter

John 10:11-18

1. What the difference between the care provided by the good shepherd and the care provided by the hired hand?
2. How many times is the “lays down his life” phrase used in this text? Why is the theme do dominant in these verses?
3. Who are some of the sheep that are “not of this sheep pen”? What is the desire of the good shepherd? How does the story in Luke 15:1-7 relate to this text?

For Family Reflection

4. Who are some of the “wolves” (vs. 12) who try to steal Jesus’ sheep today? In what way may these “wolves” be attacking you?
5. What does it mean for you that Jesus is your good shepherd?
6. Read Psalm 23. How does the psalm relate to this text?

Fourth Sunday of Easter

John 10:22-30

“Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe.’” (vs.25) Jesus’ teachings and His Person were and are unique in history. All other religions are man-imagined and none offers the world a God who loves His creation enough to die in its behalf and then give the costly salvation accomplished in this death to mankind with no strings attached. There are no works to be done by men in order to gain God’s favor. There are no frailty-filled gods who argue over man’s fate. There is no barrier between people and God. There is only a Bridge who has made us God’s own people.

Those who challenged Jesus to “...tell us plainly” had already chosen not to believe because Jesus did not fit their idea of what God must be like. The same problem continues today.

Jesus chose to become true man, one of us. He did this, not just to condemn our behavior, but to invite us into a full understanding of who He is. That understanding could have meant our destruction. In the presence of God, our sin would mean eternal death for us all. But Jesus did not condemn us. He offered Himself as the sacrifice for our failures. His free gift to us is eternal and abundant life in His presence. Only Jesus offers the world this God-created solution to sin. Only the religion known as Christianity is based on God’s power instead of man’s power.

Out of His great love for the world, and only through Himself, Jesus offers mankind an intensely personal relationship with God. How personal is this relationship for each of us, man or woman, child or adult, pastor or layperson? Jesus’ words tell it best:

“My sheep hear My voice and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”

Get to know your Father. Join a Bible study group.

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

Fourth Sunday of Easter

John 10:22-30

1. According to vs. 26, how do we become part of Jesus’ flock? When did you first become one of His flock? Did He choose you or did you choose Him?
2. According to vs. 28 what are the blessings of being part of Jesus’ flock? Do we have to worry about losing our place in His flock? How does God keep us securely and faithfully in His flock?
3. How do we demonstrate to our heavenly Father and to others that we are part of His flock? (vs. 27)
4. How did Jesus demonstrate to the audience of His day (and ours) that He truly was the Christ? (vs. 25). What proof do we have that Jesus is truly our risen Lord?

For Family Discussion

5. It’s “Good Shepherd” Sunday. Read the first part of John chapter 10. How did Jesus show that He is the Good Shepherd? (vs. 15) Can you find a picture of the Good Shepherd in your church or home?
6. Sing or read “I Am Jesus’ Little Lamb” (LSB#740). Why are you happy that you’re His lamb? Who else needs to know about our Shepherd Jesus?