

## Acts 9:32-43

In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. Lydda was near Joppa, so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!" Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes, and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

## John 10:22-30

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

## "Raising Up Disciples"

This year, the rising up of Easter faith within me, began as a desire for my five grandchildren to get to know their Grammy and Grampy better. So I asked of my picture taking, computer art husband: Can you make us a greeting card with pictures on it that we can send to our grandkids each week? More specifically, one that is designed like this: Front: Picture of our home with the words, 'this is Grammy and Grampy's home' printed on the bottom. Inside Left: picture of our grandchild with the questions---Hi (Henry, Wyatt, Riley, Rose, Reese), How are you? What's up?; Inside Right: picture of something that happened in our family (flood and river rising, bird on birdfeeder, Red Sox game) with a one line explanation; Back: picture of Don and myself with the caption, "I Love You," with big XXX's and OOO's.

What happened when they got the cards? When Henry received the card and his mother asked, "Who is the card from?" He said: "Somebody who loves me." Riley started kissing the people pictures. Wyatt and Rose looked at the faces as their mommy and daddy read the words to them. Reese did her age appropriate thing and tried to eat the card. I was happy to hear that they seemed to like them. But what gladdened my heart even more, was something that happened a few days later with the older boys. Henry asked his mother: Who is God? And Wyatt, who has night terrors, asked his mother if he could call Grammy and Grampy up to say, "good night."

I was delighted that the spiritual longing to know God and the desire to feel safe by hearing the voice of a comforting presence was being awakened within them.

When we look into our Biblical texts we find similar spiritual awakenings occurring and words for God to nurture that faith. The Lord is our shepherd---is one of our favorites. In psalm 23 the

people of Israel describe their experience of God as a shepherd who cares for them in such a way that they are in want of nothing. When they dwell in the house of the Lord, they are protected, and are loved as children of God . . . forever. When I started to think about the importance of these prayer words to my faith, my thoughts turned back to the grandparent card. I wondered, when my husband and I are gone, whose house will remind our grandchildren of being at home with God? Will it be a synagogue, a temple, a meeting house, a chapel in the woods, a church, a virtual chat room in the internet?

In the gospel reading according to the disciple John, we find the frightened people in that persecuted community putting the shepherd image, voice of comfort, and protective action of God on the face of Jesus. In John's community, Jesus was known as the Good Shepherd because Jesus had laid down his life for the saving of their soul and they could trust what he had said to them. When I started to think about the importance of the voice of Jesus who comforts and leads us, my thoughts turned back to Wyatt's telephone call to Grammy and Grampy. As it turned out, that previous morning, when he had tried to wake up his daddy to take care of him that day, his father said: 'Give me fifteen minutes, buddy, and I'll come to play.' When his father rolled back to sleep, Wyatt went to a corner and cried. Even our loved ones who care for us deeply and would lay down their lives to save us, are not and cannot always be available to us. When Wyatt walks down the valley of shadows at night, he needs Jesus, who is always there to accompany him. . . not like mommy or daddy, and not even like Grammy and Grampy who were away at the Red Sox game when he called.

In the reading from Acts, we find the apostles putting the Jesus Shepherd image on the disciple Dorcas. When Dorcas died, the widowed women did not want their thriving community to die with her. Under her leadership, the women created an inclusive, mutually

sustaining, compassionate-care-giving community of faith. Like "Made For Survivors," the widows who thought that their lives were over, found new life and meaning doing good works for others. When Peter said, "Tabitha, cumi," she rose up to continue her work. When she did, every widow experienced being a Jesus disciple and being an important participant in the Lord's saving of the world. When I thought about the Power of The Risen Good Shepherd as a whole community doing good works, I wondered about my daughter's response to Henry's question, "Who is God?" After formulating an answer which she thought Henry could understand because his father collects comic book super hero action figures, she said, "God is the greatest superhero guy there is." I wondered: Will God have the face of Superman, Iron Man, or Batman in Henry's mind? Will he think that he has to have some special power in order to do good and to help people out?

Meanwhile, back in the Bible on the Island of Patmos, the exiled disciple John was being spiritually revived through meditation on a vision he had received. In his vision, the community of resurrection faith called Christ the Good Shepherd--- The Lamb. John, it seems, was in need of faith in the saving power of the cross. His Jesus friends had all been martyred. The Roman empire was still killing everybody. Jesus' sacrificial death had not done its atoning work of breaking the cycle of violence in the hearts of men. Although the first communities of the resurrection had come to proclaim: Christ has died. Christ Is Risen. Christ will come again. . . . the world was not yet free from the deadly power of guilt and sin. John needed assurance that Jesus' way of non-violent, self giving, active resistance to evil was the saving way of love's power. The vision assured him that it was.

**After this I looked and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and people and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed**

**in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!'** (Rev. 7:9-10).

John wrote down his vision for future generations, so that meditation on The Lamb could resurrect up hopeless souls with the peace of Christ that passes all human understanding.

When I thought about the importance of meditating on sacred texts for a Biblical understanding God, I smiled at what Henry's father did after he heard about his wife's "super-hero" explanation of God. He went out and bought a children's Bible for Henry. Henry's favorite story right now is, David and Goliath. I wonder, will Henry ever be comforted and empowered like the apostle John, by the image of Jesus the Shepherd and Christ the Lamb? Will he ever come to know that John's vision is God's Love Letter of hope to him? And to all people in the world?

**And all the angels stood around the throne and round 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.**

**"Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. 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** (Rev. 7:11-17).