

Friday in Easter Week

April 9, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Acts 4:1–12; Psalm 116:1–8; Psalm 118:24; John 21:1–14

Today's gospel lesson is the beginning of what we know as the final chapter of John, chapter 21. Scholars regard it as an epilogue or appendix to the gospel. John seems to end with the two last verses of chapter 20: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."¹

What is not appointed to be read this week is the conclusion of this chapter. We will hear it on Friday and Saturday before Pentecost. I'm sure you know it. It is the passage where Jesus questions Peter three times about whether Peter loves him. Jesus responds to Peter, "Then feed my lambs . . . Then tend my sheep . . . Then feed my little sheep."² There is a prediction of Peter's arrest and a suggestion of martyrdom. The final scene includes the presence of the disciple known only as the disciple Jesus loved. Peter asks Jesus, "What about him?"³ Jesus tells Peter it is not something he needs to worry about. This epilogue also names the disciple Jesus loved as the author of the gospel. There are no ancient texts of the fourth gospel that do not include most, if not all, of what we know as the final chapter.⁴

This epilogue's significant theme is how hard it is for his disciples to recognize his risen presence. If one includes his appearance to Mary Magdalene, this is the fourth time his own have not known him.

¹ John 20:30–31.

² John 21:15–18.

³ John 21:21.

⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 334, 360 n.70, 367.

A second theme is Peter's call to remain a disciple, be a pastor to others, and bear witness to what he has seen. Note that the first twenty chapters of John have no interest in who is the leader of the community.⁵ In John, Jesus is himself the shepherd of his sheep.⁶ All who believe are branches of the True Vine, again Jesus himself.⁷

I rarely part ways with remarks by the late Raymond Brown. Still, I think it is fair to object to his use of the phrase “apostolic authority” in this comment on this last chapter, “The tradition that Peter is the symbol of apostolic authority is not challenged.”⁸ Referring to chapter 13, verse 16, the current American edition of the Roman Catholic English-language Bible notes, “the Greek has *apostolos*, the only occurrence of the term in John. It is not used in the technical sense here”⁹—in other words, there's no place in this gospel for the title “apostle.” This is the verse in question: “Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him.”¹⁰ To paraphrase a verse from Psalm 95, “We are the people of Jesus' pasture and the sheep of Jesus' hand.”¹¹

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Copyright © 2021 The Society of the Free Church of St. Mary the Virgin, New York, New York.

All rights reserved.

⁵ Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 545.

⁶ John 10:14–15, 27–28.

⁷ John 15:1–11.

⁸ Brown, 361.

⁹ <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/john/13>, (accessed 9 April 2021).

¹⁰ John 13:16. NABRE

¹¹ Psalm 95:7.