

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 25, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year B: Acts 4:32–37; Psalm 23; 1 John 3:1–8; John 10:14; John 10:11–21**

Today’s gospel lesson is the conclusion of a long story that begins with these words, “As [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” [He] answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.”¹

Today’s gospel is part of John’s story of Jesus being in Jerusalem over several days for the Feast of Tabernacles.² When we hear this part of the story of that visit on the Fourth Sunday of Lent in the first year of the lectionary cycle—last year, it ends, “Jesus heard that [the Pharisees] had cast the [man born blind] out [of the temple], and having found him [Jesus] said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of man?’ He answered, ‘And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you.’ He said, ‘Lord, I believe’; and he worshiped him.”³ [Then] “Jesus said, ‘For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.’ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this, and they said to him, ‘Are we also blind?’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, “We see,” your guilt remains.’ ”⁴

Then the Pharisees hear more from him. He says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber; but he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep . . . The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”⁵

¹ John 9:1–2.

² John 7:1–10:21.

³ John 9:35–38.

⁴ John 9:40–41.

⁵ John 10:1, 10.

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church draws this contrast of the Pharisees with the Sadducees: “Unlike the Sadducees, who tried to apply the Mosaic Law precisely as it was given, the Pharisees allowed some interpretation . . . They exerted their influence through the development of education, and fostered synagogue worship. They gradually secured a large following among the common people, who admired their austerity and shared their hatred of the pagan rulers and the [priestly] caste.”⁶

Reading these words made me wonder how much of the opposition we read towards and from the Pharisees in the New Testament has to do with the first Christians vying with this group for support among Judeans.

The conclusion of the man born blind is divided between the Fourth Sunday of Easter in Year A and this year. The following story in John will place Jesus in Jerusalem for another feast: the Dedication of the Temple. He will again speak about the sheep and their relationship with him.⁷ This will be the gospel lesson next year on the Fourth Sunday of Easter. After that, John’s gospel continues, “Now a certain man was ill, Laz’arus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha⁸—the Lazarus Jesus raises from the dead.

I want to say something about Jesus looking for you and me and about you and me deciding to acknowledge the presence of God’s Spirit in our lives. In her book *God Dwells with Us*, Mary Coloe, an Australian New Testament scholar, writes of Jesus’ disciples, “At some point of their experience of the [Risen] Jesus, the community must have come to a realization that now *their* humanity was the locus of God’s presence in the world.” She continues, “they were participating in Jesus’ own experience of God, the intimacy

⁶ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (ODCC) 2ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), s.v. “Pharisees,” 1077–78.

⁷ In Year C at Saint Mary’s, we include John 10:31–42 so that we hear all of this chapter at the Sunday Eucharists.

⁸ John 11:1.

between Son and Father”⁹—for some of us, it may be better to say, “between child and parent.”

Yesterday as I walked home from the gym, I began crossing one of the streets near a Dunkin Donuts. A young couple with a child was there. The boy started away from his parents, heading to the corner. His dad said quickly, gently, and but a clear parental voice, “Come back. You are only four years old. You don’t need to go to the corner.” The child was not unhappy. He seemed glad to be out in the morning, full of energy, with his father and his mother.

Each of us builds and rebuilds his or her relationship with the Risen Jesus throughout our lives, with ups and downs, with challenges and burdens, and after a certain point in time, with the knowledge that each of us will die. Most of us hope we will not die “suddenly and unprepared,” to use a phrase from the Prayer Book.¹⁰ In John, I think it’s correct to say that no literary convention is more significant than the way Mary Magdalene recognizes Jesus on the morning of his resurrection: he calls her by her name.

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

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⁹ Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 220.

¹⁰ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 149.