

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Cycle B

Acts of the Apostles 4:8-12; 1John 3:1-2; and John 10:11-18

For two weeks, our nation followed the trial of Derek Chauvin, the police officer accused of killing George Floyd last May. Even though a video showed an emotionless Chauvin kneel on Floyd's neck for 9½ minutes and witnesses testified that Chauvin made his own choices, the outcome of the trial was a huge question mark. Since 2005, police officers have killed thousands of Blacks, yet only 140 officers have been charged with murder and only seven have been convicted ([Philadelphia Inquirer](#)). In our ongoing struggle to balance respect for the police who must make split-second decisions and the undeniable racism in the US justice system, we waited with baited breath for the jury's decision.

In [Caste](#), Isabel Wilkerson recounts how in 1934 the Nazis planned their strategy to make the oppression of Jews acceptable. They looked to America as the best example of a country that had woven racial oppression through every aspect of its culture and government (p. 77ff). This shocking historical fact that our great country, a model of freedom, was so obviously corrupted that it could provide a template for Nazism, should dispel any surprise that we had no idea how the jury in Chauvin's trial would vote.

Our confusion is similar to the confusion in which both Peter and Jesus find themselves in this Sunday's readings. In the gospel, Jesus' Good Shepherd metaphor comes on the heels of the cure of a man born blind. As you may recall, when Jesus healed the man, a lengthy to-do ensued in which the disciples wanted to know whose sin caused the blindness and Jewish leaders questioned whether Jesus really healed him. Everyone was afraid. No one was clear, except the man who was healed. He said, "If this man was not from God, he could do nothing" (9:33). The Pharisees display an endless lack of clarity about who Jesus is and whether to believe in him. Yet they insist on being leaders. This is the heart of their problem, leading Jesus to say to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin, but now that you say 'We see,' your sin remains" (9:41). In our passage, Jesus contrasts the awful protection of the Jewish leaders (a.k.a. the hired man) with the superlative care he provides as the Good Shepherd. He even has complete control over dying for his sheep; his death will not be because someone more powerful took it from him. Jesus telegraphs that we should reject leaders who are bankrupt spiritually and follow him. The righteous leader always does the righteous acts of healing and standing up for the people who most need support, the sheep that the wolf comes to eat.

Acts shows what following the Good Shepherd looks like, viz. also healing and standing up to anyone who tries to stop it. The religious leaders have again arrested someone – this time Peter and John -- for a clearly good action on behalf of someone in suffering and poverty – this time a man who was crippled. The leaders' behavior reveals their spiritual bankruptcy: after Peter's bold speech, they cannot decide what to do next. They let the apostles go with a wishy-washy rebuke, because they fear the people. The people have recognized the righteousness of the healing. Ordinary as they are, they grasp that healing someone who is suffering is good and they stand behind it. Ordinariness is no obstacle to faith. Peter, whom the religious leaders note is common and uneducated (4:13), is filled with the Spirit. This gives him the clarity to proclaim, "There is no salvation through anyone else nor is there any other name... by which we are to be saved."

The idea of being so clear may scare us. Will we offend someone? Will we get in trouble? Who will we be? The author of 1John says, "we are God's children now." A little later, the author will explain that this means that we must love one another (3:13). Quite simple. "What we shall be has not yet been revealed," but it will be God-like. So we, like Peter, can step into a deep trust in the Good Shepherd. To do the healing work of Jesus may be dangerous, but it is definitely righteous. We can be bold because Jesus, our protector and provider, is with us. Jesus will cure our lifelong blindness and we will choose leaders who ensure that justice is never to be wondered over again.

- ❖ How do you feel about racism in our country? Ask God to open your eyes to your role in it.
- ❖ Who around you needs healing? What fears keep you from helping? Pray to the Spirit for boldness like Peter's.