

“Being For The Oppressed”
Psalm 23
1 John 3:16-24
John 10:11-18

We have gathered the Fourth Sunday of Easter to remember and experience this truth: Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Jesus rose from the dead, accomplishing forgiveness, rebirth, and God’s saving power for humanity. About the transformational power of the resurrection, Leith Anderson writes,

I own a marvelous little book written nearly a quarter of a century ago by a former shepherd, Philip Keller. He titled the book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm Twenty-Three*. Keller tells about his experience as a shepherd in east Africa. The land adjacent to his was rented out to a tenant shepherd who didn’t take very good care of his sheep: his land was overgrazed, eaten down to the ground; the sheep were thin, diseased by parasites, and attacked by wild animals. Keller especially remembered how the neighbor’s sheep would line up at the fence and blankly stare in the direction of his green grass and his healthy sheep, almost as if they yearned to be delivered from their abusive shepherd. They longed to come to the other side of the fence and belong to him. Christians understand that the identity of the shepherd is everything. It is wonderful to be able to say, “The Lord is my shepherd.”¹

Reconciliation, in the midst of oppression, is impossible if the voice and presence of the shepherd is absent.

Brokenness fosters oppression. Oppression betrays the need for reconciliation. Reconciliation is accomplished in and through Jesus who said he was the way, the truth, and the life. Moreover, the Greatest Commandment, The Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25 demonstrate how oppression is overcome through reconciliation. In this regard, Latasha Morrison, author of *Be The Bridge*, our resource book for this series

¹As found on preachingtoday.com. Leith Anderson, “The Lord Is My Shepherd” in *Preaching Today*, Tape 136.

writes, “Awareness and confession of wrongdoing are vital steps in the reconciliation process. But confession alone is not enough. True reconciliation requires that we change our behavior, that we set a new trajectory. This change of trajectory, this about-face, is what we call repentance.”² Whether the sin is gossip, racist words and actions, sexist words and actions, rejection of the “other” in any form, anger, hate and inequity of any kind, they all depict human brokenness. And human brokenness oppresses the “other.”

Psalm 23, 1 John 3:16-24 and John 10:11-18 proclaim that all humans are able to hear the Shepherd’s voice, calling for reconciliation, if they will listen.

Psalm 23 declares that the shepherd passionately cares for the sheep. Psalm 23:2-3 reads “He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me besides still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake..”

1 John 3:16-24 teaches that an engaging, not withdrawing (ghosting) relationship with others and the “other” is necessary for wholistic and reconciled well-being. 1 John 3:17 reads, “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?”

John 10:11-18 indicates that Jesus cares for the “other” sheep too. There is one flock. “Others” are the poor from the perspective of the affluent and the affluent from the perspective of the poor. “Others” are those on the margins of society. “Others” are those who may adhere to and practice the traditions and beliefs of the other three world religions. “Others” are those different than us. “Others” are atheists. Just like sheep we wander and go astray. A good shepherd is not in it for money, prestige or any such thing. A good shepherd is willing to sacrifice in any way necessary for the sheep. Jesus’s voice

²Latasha Morrison, *Be The Bridge* (WaterBrook, 2019), 134.

brings order, truth, competence, faithfulness, and evidence of God at work to our experience. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, gathers the flock. We might not like “Others,” for whatever reason, but they too can recognize the Shepherd’s voice. And we can and must be the voice and presence of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. John 10:16 reads, “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”³

The message of the Fourth Sunday of Easter is this: Jesus knows your name. Let us engage, not withdraw from “others.” When we act lovingly, the love of Jesus is “pulsing through our hearts and hands.”⁴ Latasha Morrison, citing Daniel Hill’s prayer, the pastor of River City Community Church in Chicago, writes,

We repent of the violent acts done in the name of racism. We repent of the apathy that has caused so many of us to sit on the sidelines and just watch in a bewildered state. We confess everything that has gotten in your way. ... We confess the ways that our white supremacy has infected our judicial system, the way it has infected our police systems where it has minimized the lives of other people. As Christians of differing ethnicities, we share a common heritage, a common memory.⁵

We are to stand with the other. Every time we repent, we affirm the new trajectory of becoming the new humanity God envisioned from his first word of creation, “Let there be light.”

³In the four paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Rhodora E. Beaton, Steven J. Kraftchick, Lindsey S. Jodrey, Deidre Good and Rodger Y. Nishioka in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 238-239, 240-242, 242-244, 245-246 and 247-248.

⁴Ronald Cole-Turner in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, editors, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 2*, 446.

⁵Latasha Morrison, *Be The Bridge*, 145, citing Hill’s prayer in YouTube video, 5:46, posted by “evansjamesjr,” December 1, 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdaqcbSCIfy.

When we stand with the oppressed, we come face to face with God. Here is my takeaway challenge for today's sermon application. "Why are we so often blind to our own sins but fully aware of the sins of others?"⁶ Ponder and reflect upon that question. Write down your thoughts. Be humble. Be an empathetic historian. Be a reconciler and healer. Be for the oppressed. "Others" want to hear and see Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 25 April 2021
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⁶Latasha Morrison, *Be The Bridge*, 146.