

Fourth Sunday of Easter Lectionary: 49

IHM Motherhouse Chapel

May 3, 2020 +

Acts 2:14A, 36-41

Psalm 23: 1-3A, 3B4, 5, 6

1 Peter 2:20b-25

John 10:1-10

Written by Julie Vieira, IHM

One cannot get through a chapter or perhaps even a verse in the Gospel of John without being immersed in a rich symbolism. Although the other three evangelists are thought of as being more “earthy,” John also can go there, but of course, even when being earthy, John invites us into deeper meaning central to our life with God.

Our Gospel today is one such earthy passage. After all, we’ve got sheep and a shepherd and a pasture – all very earthy! John also taps into our own earthiness – our human senses of seeing and hearing.

It’s important to note that this passage comes right after the story of the person born blind. Let’s look at that story for just a moment because it can illumine today’s reading. The story of the person born blind is also a very earthy passage. It literally involves the earth – dirt and saliva mixed together as mud – and the human sense of seeing (John 9:6-7).

Earthy? Yes. But did everyone get the deeper meaning? No, only the person who could see knew that something “more than” had happened. Everyone was confounded by the healing of the person born blind, especially the Pharisees. The Pharisees had pegged Jesus as a sinner and refused to believe that anything good – let alone miraculous – could come from him.

A person born blind now sees? But it wasn’t just seeing people, trees, water, sky. The person saw more. Jesus completes the person’s *deeper* healing by seeking him out and revealing that his instincts were right on.

“Who is this Son of Man that I might believe?” (John 9:36)

“You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” (John 9:37)

John moves us then from the sense of *seeing* to the sense of *hearing*. The person who is blind not only *sees* but *hears* and in this hearing comes to believe in Jesus.

Now we enter into today’s Gospel where Jesus takes this sense of hearing even further. Jesus teaches the people with a parable, again, with a very earthy approach. Jesus speaks, that is, he *engages* their sense of hearing. The sheep, Jesus says *hear* the voice of the shepherd. The shepherd calls the sheep by name and leads them out. The sheep follow because *they know their shepherd’s voice*. They will not follow a stranger because they do not know the voice of strangers.

Much like in the previous chapter, the people are confounded. They have no idea what the deeper meaning of this parable is. Sure, they know about animal husbandry, but what does that have to do with Jesus?

It's not often that Jesus explains a parable. Usually he allows the parable to linger in people's imaginations, challenging them to think more deeply about their life and relationship with God.

Yet in today's Gospel, the people cannot hear the deeper meaning and so Jesus cuts to the chase – and the heart – and he explains what he means by the parable. Essentially, he is saying, "Listen now to my voice. Hear now the deeper meaning of this parable."

"Very truly, I tell you, *I* am the gate for the sheep." It is through me, Jesus says, that you find belonging, safety, nourishment, life. It is through me that you will find salvation and you will "have life, and have it abundantly."

Although Jesus explains the parable, it's still not the end of the story. The story continues as each of us makes this word our home, as John would say. As we each discover what it means for ME in MY life.

See what John has done. John starts us off with an earthy image, then takes us for a deep dive rich in symbolism. We dwell there for a bit, but then the pasture gate swings wide open, and we have to walk into our own earthy lives once again to live what we have seen and heard in a deeper way.

And so we use our very earthy, human senses of seeing ... hearing ... smelling ... tasting ... and touching to go deeper into our relationship with God and to be more expansive in our life, in our relationships. It matters *not* how well these senses function.

Can I taste the love, for example, in the homemade tomato soup that my grandmother made for me every Sunday? Can I hear the silent cry of loneliness in my neighbor's gruff manner of speaking? Can you see the beauty in the tiny green buds just beginning to unfurl?

Or do I allow thieves and bandits to steal these from me? Does my hurried, "got to get to the next thing" pace steal from me the present moment? Does my desire for perfect grammar, perfect appearance – perfect everything! – steal from me the beauty of true expression? Does my fixation on bad news steal from me the good news all around me?

Jesus says, "I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly." How might we, with all our earthiness, embrace the call to an abundant life – both for ourselves and for the whole earth community?

Don't forget what God can do with a bit of mud, a few loaves and fishes, or even bread and wine!