



COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 11 MAY 2025 – Easter 4

COLLECT

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life:
raise us, who trust in him,
from the death of sin to the life of righteousness,
that we may seek those things which are above,
where he reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Psalm 23

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd; ♦
therefore can I lack nothing.
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures ♦
and leads me beside still waters.
- 3 He shall refresh my soul ♦
and guide me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
- 4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; ♦
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
- 5 You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; ♦
you have anointed my head with oil and my cup shall be full.
- 6 Surely goodness and loving mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, ♦
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 9, verses 36-43.

Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, 'Please come to us without delay.' So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, 'Tabitha, get up.' Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

At Morning Prayer, the Gospel is simply the second reading, people sit to hear it and is introduced in the same way as the first:

The second reading is from John, chapter 10, verses 22-30.

and then at the end:

For the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

For Eucharists/ Communion people stand to hear the Gospel. Everywhere except Fitz introduces it with an Acclamation (the blue bit), and then we all use the introduction and ending (the green bit):

Alleluia. **Alleluia.**

This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Alleluia.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to John, Chapter 10, verses 22-30.

Glory to you, O Lord

And then at the end:

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

John 10. 22-30

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.' Jesus answered, 'I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one.'

A Reflection from Peter

So our Paschal journey continues: the first excitement is past and we are tempted to think that things are returning to normal. But while our Gospel seems to be a rerun of old battles between Jesus and the political and religious leaders, the first reading has much more of the new and the unexpected as we witness Tabitha being brought back to life by Peter. We could well go on to make a contrast between the disciples (who have now got the message!), together with the fast-growing Christian community on the one hand, and those who are stuck in the past like all those who have not grasped the life-changing wonder of resurrection. But I want instead to focus on a tiny detail.

St John tells us that the Feast of Dedication is happening and, he says, it is winter. Now, in the fourth Gospel, every time you get mention of the weather or the time of day, it is significant. Here the mention of winter conjures up exactly the feeling evoked by T S Eliot in "The journey of the Magi" - 'A cold coming we had of it, at the very dead of winter...' Both John and the poet convey that sense of deadness, that struggle to survive, much less grow. A Festival is taking place, but that can hardly break through the grip of winter. And Jesus' old adversaries are pressing him for a straightforward answer to their question: Are you the Messiah? The trouble is that, for them, the idea of the Messiah has come to have a whole lot of baggage - and Jesus is not buying into that. He says (rather wearily!) "I have told you, and you do not believe." But then goes on to try and move them into a new world, into something more spring-like. "I and the Father are one," he says. It sounds fairly unremarkable. It could be like Rachel Reeves responding to a question that is trying to discern splits in the government and saying, "The prime-minister and I are completely in accord."

But this is Jesus - and suddenly, we are in the new, exciting, unpredictable world of the possibilities that only God enables. "I and the Father are one." Or, as Bishop Michael Ramsey once put it, "In God there is no unChristlikeness!" The Pharisees, of course, are scandalised. How can he say he is one with God? There is only one God...

And indeed, this one line becomes a key point of conflict in the unfolding story of the attempt to put into words the reality of God, as revealed in Jesus through the power of the Spirit. This year we are celebrating the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed and when the Council was being called the various parties did their best to drum up support for their position before the formal debate. So, one side (the majority who eventually prevailed, united behind the slogan "I and the Father are One" - and you can picture their supporters all rushing round with banners with the text emblazoned in striking colours. Another group fell in behind those who who became the losers: their slogan was "The Father is greater than I". In other words, they both used scripture (and the fourth Gospel) to try and score points. But God is concerned with life, not with point scoring and goes on drawing us all into the springtime of the new creation. And that's why there is another lovely detail in our first reading: before Peter gives Tabitha the gift of new life her friends and relatives were busy showing everyone the needlework, tunics and other clothing that she had made. They were showing, in a very practical way, their love and admiration for the friend they thought they had lost. But God is utterly practical too. After praying, Peter gave Tabitha a hand and helped her up - up into new life. So we go on, never doubting the generosity and the power of our God.