

Homily for the 4th Sunday of Easter

April 24-25, 2021

Readings: Acts 4: 8-12; 1 John 3: 1-2; John 10: 11-18

Preacher: Nancy DeRycke

Did you ever find yourself saying: “I just wish someone would tell me what to do”? Whether it’s praying for the proverbial thunderbolt from heaven so there can be no mistake ...or whether, when we’re tired or hassled, we just want someone to take us by the hand and tell us what’s the best thing.

On this Vocation Sunday, we could be tempted to believe that God calls us and that there is only one way, one vocation God wants for us (married, clergy, single, etc.), but God’s “call” is that we live our life abundantly in whatever way we choose. Just as a good parent doesn’t put pressure on or dictate what they want their kids to do or be, I believe God’s “call” is not to do a particular thing or live particular way of life, but to become our best selves.

I think each of us sometimes feels like we’re wandering in search of direction, wondering what is the meaning of our life. Our Gospel today talks about sheep, known for wandering. It’s a familiar scriptural theme.

In ancient Palestine, sheep did wander a lot, in danger of being attacked by wild animals or stolen by thieves or getting lost and falling off ledges. Shepherds could never leave them. At night when they came down from the hillside, the shepherd would guide them into a walled pasture with less chance of being attacked or getting lost. These “sheepfolds” had only one opening to go in and out, so the shepherd would literally become the door, lying to sleep across the opening. Jesus says he is the *shepherd*, the *door*. To go “in and out” was the Jewish understanding of freedom and peace in the world.

Jesus then offers himself to them and us as one who cares, willing to guide us when we have no energy or sense of direction, when we have gone astray. Jesus doesn’t offer to do everything for us, but to always be with us.

He doesn't stop there—he also offers himself as the cornerstone—one on whom we can depend even when we feel rejected. How often have we found ourselves rejected, questioned, challenged by our children, parents, coworkers, friends, our church—even when we are trying to do or push toward the right thing the best we can.

In our first reading, the elders had just gotten rid of Jesus, who lived his “vocation” challenging ways that had outlived their usefulness and being challenged. But now Peter and the other apostles were healing and doing the same things that Jesus did, causing problems all over again. There's no way to totally stop the Spirit/the Love of God. For those elders back then or for us or anyone now, when we try to block growth, when we try to limit how God's love can work through others, we miss the understanding of vocation, of being called by God.

Even today some leaders and people are still challenging us, trying to protect the status quo in our church and world, limiting vocations to traditional models of clergy, religious life, marriage, etc. No matter how we live our “vocation,” each one of us is called to respect each person trying to be loving shepherds for those around them. And to help each other.

You and I have the vocation of being aware of how much God loves us and loves *through* us, doing peace and justice work, laying down our energy, our time for those who are the flock around us—however we can.

It's at times like these we need a reminder that we have a cornerstone—that God will not leave us alone and will give us strength together to meet each challenge. Jesus never promised it would be easy. His life wasn't, why should we expect differently? But it is worth it.

So please, never give up believing in that “vocation” within you—share your abundant life with the community. And encourage others to do the same in their unique ways.

Believe you can make a powerful difference in the way you chose to live your life—so keep choosing carefully. There is no “thunderbolt” to tell you the perfect way to go.

And please believe that you are not alone—Jesus promises: “I am with you always.”