

Notes for Next Sunday

Fourth Sunday of Easter

The Point of this Week's Readings

First Reading (Acts 20:17-35). In chapter 19 Paul through God's power did many miracles and brought many to faith. In fact Paul was so successful in pointing to the true God that the people turned away from man-made idols. This caused a riot which put Paul in great physical danger. In our reading Paul is getting ready to leave Ephesus and he giving in-depth instruction to the elders. He is encouraging them to be solid in the teachings he had shared with the people during his three years in Ephesus. Paul also urges them to be protectors of the people concerning their spiritual welfare.

Second Reading (Revelation 7:9-17). This is a picture of heaven. This is the church triumphant, at rest and peace in Christ's presence and awaiting the final act of God's judgment. We on earth are the church militant still in the battle against all evil. These people have finished the fight and have won. White robes represent purity and palm branches symbolize victory. Their victory has nothing to do with their own efforts but the blood of the Lamb (Jesus) has saved them. Heaven, in many ways, is too impossible to truly comprehend, but the last verses in this text list some very painful things that will never be experienced in heaven.

Gospel (John 10:22-30). Here Jesus is having an interchange with the Jews who are also in the temple for the Feast of Dedication. The Jewish leaders had been listening to Jesus and watching His activities but they did not believe Him to be the Messiah they had been waiting for many years. Now they confront Him about whether He really is the Christ. Jesus reminds them that they have not believed in Him and are not His sheep. Jesus points out that true sheep listen to Him and follow Him. They have been given to Him by the Father. Since they are in the Father's care they are protected by His love for them and cannot be separated from His love.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

FIRST READING – Acts 20:17-35

¹⁷ From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. ¹⁹ I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. ²⁰ You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. ²¹ I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. ²² "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. ²⁵ "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. ²⁶ Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. ²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in

order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. ³² “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. ³⁵ In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

20:17 elders of the church. The church at Ephesus was made up of a number of local churches or congregations. The elders were the leaders of those churches, men chosen for their mature judgment and spiritual knowledge. They were “overseers” and “shepherds”. That can only mean that they carried out the pastoral ministry in those churches. (PBC)

20:22 compelled by the Spirit. Paul did not go to Jerusalem against the direction of the Spirit, as some have suggested, but because of the guidance of the Spirit. People pleaded with him not to go (21:4, 12), not because the Spirit prohibited his going but because the Spirit revealed the capture that awaited him there (21:11–12). (CSB)

20:27 the whole will of God. Paul proclaimed the entire OT Scriptures, as all pastors, preachers, and teachers of God’s Word should. (TLSB)

20:35 remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said. Though not recorded in any of the four Gospels of the NT, the saying is nevertheless genuine. This demonstrates that Jesus’ sayings, and stories about Jesus, continued to circulate among believers and were regarded as authoritative, useful admonitions. (TLSB)

SECOND READING – Revelation 7:9-17

⁹ After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” ¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: “Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!” ¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?” ¹⁴ I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. ¹⁶ Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

7:14 the great tribulation.† Described in ch. 6. No passage of Scripture teaches that the church will be “raptured” out of this world for seven years. Jesus also spoke of great distress in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem and the final destruction of the world (Mt 24:15–28). Nowhere in Scripture are the words “great tribulation” used in connection with a reference to “seven years.” (CSB)

Because John's vision includes the faithful from every nation and every time, it is appropriate to see those who yet live faithfully here on earth as part of that gathering. In fact, when Christians gather for worship in this world, they may be understood as participating by faith in the ongoing heavenly praise. (TLSB)

7:15–17 The perfect bliss of the heavenly host is described in a series of 10 statements. The first three lines of the poem describe the blessedness of believers in the presence of God. The next four lines depict the freedom of God's people from the effects of sin. The last three lines give the source of their bliss: the Lord will shepherd them to the water of life (cf. Jn 4:14). (CSB)

7:15 spread his tent. The imagery would evoke memories of the tabernacle in the desert (Lev 26:11–13). (CSB)

7:17 shepherd. Ancient kings often referred to themselves as the shepherds of their people. (CSB)

7:17 springs of living water. "Fountains of the waters of life" (7:17) is an expression for the source of life. God himself is that source of life. (CC)

GOSPEL – John 10:22-30

²² Then came the Feast of Dedication^a at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. ²⁴ The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." ²⁵ Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

The larger context begins in chapter 9 with the healing of the blind man, as Jesus reveals himself as the Son of Man. In chapter 10 Jesus identifies himself as the true and good shepherd (10:1–18). Jesus spoke the language of double talk: both by his miracle that restored sight and by his teaching, he gave insight as to who he was—the Son of Man. The Jews are divided as to his authenticity; some say he is demon-possessed; others know demons do not open the eyes of blind people (vv 19–21). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

10:22 Feast of Dedication. Also called Feast of Lights or Hanukkah. Celebrated the rededication of the temple in 164 BC, following its desecration by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The festival was joyous and included recitation of Ps 30. (TLSB)

10:23 Solomon's Colonnade. Sheltered area on the east side of the temple, with a roof supported by columns that provided some protection from the weather. Popular place for rabbis and their disciples to gather. (TLSB)

10:28 eternal life. A uniqueness of this Shepherd is that he not only lays down his life for the sheep but also gives life to his sheep out of grace. To perish is more than temporal death. It is eternal. No enemy can snatch us from the Shepherd's grasp, but we ourselves can turn from him and reject his gift of grace. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)