

## **Reflection for 4<sup>th</sup>. Sunday of Easter** by Jacqueline Kemp (Lay Reader)

The first reading for today is not, as is customary, from the Old Testament, but from the book of Acts. Just for a brief period the Church seems to want to catch the excitement of the Resurrection and cannot wait for fifty days until Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

So here we are in Chapter 4 with the disciples Peter and John on trial in a Jewish court. We need to remind ourselves about why they were in trouble. Going back to the previous chapter, Peter and John, on their way into the temple to pray, saw a man, crippled from birth, who begged from them. Peter said he had no money but that, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, he should get up and walk, which he did after a helping hand. There were many witnesses and the man was so ecstatic he was causing a great sensation. That gave Peter the opportunity to tell the crowd about Jesus.

Peter did not mince his words. "Why were you, Jews, so surprised when God had performed this miracle? Jesus, whom you handed over to the Roman authorities for execution had been raised from the dead by God. It is in the name of Jesus and through his power that this cripple could now walk." Then Peter's tone softened. "You didn't realise what you were doing. Now is the time to repent. You are the heirs of Abraham's covenant with God and through your nation will all the nations of the earth be blessed." The Temple authorities arrested Peter and John but many people in that crowd had been convinced.

The two disciples were kept as prisoners overnight and put on trial the next morning by a committee of very senior men in the Jewish leadership. Peter was asked about the authority he had to perform this miracle and replied boldly it was by the power of Jesus the Nazarene, "Whom you crucified and God raised from the dead." The committee was astounded by the accusation from an 'uneducated layman' but in view of the unarguable cure of the cripple himself and all of those who had been witnesses, were unable to make a decision about how to proceed. They decided to let Peter and John go without punishment but cautioned them never to talk about Jesus again. To which the answer was, "Do we obey you or God?" As usual we have carefully chosen complementary readings. John's first letter to the early Christians gives advice, as his other letters do, on living the Christian life. He summarises in Chapter 3 verse 16 with two simple principles; "This is the proof of love, that he laid down his life for us and we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."

The familiar and much loved Psalm 23 says that the Almighty God loves us and protects us like a shepherd looking after his sheep. And Jesus picks up that theme in today's reading from John's gospel, saying that he is the good shepherd who would even give up his life to protect the sheep. This was exactly what was happening when the cripple was cured in the Temple, that Peter immediately explained. Jesus, the good shepherd, was killed for their sake and was raised by God. In the power of Jesus, love was shown in the cure of a cripple. A powerful lesson for us all. Amen.