

**Sermon: 2019/05/12 - (4th Sunday of Easter Day) - Acts 9:36-43;  
Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17; & John 10:22-30\_BTR**

[Invite children to the front.]

Peter did something *amazing*.  
What did he do?  
Do you know?  
Were you listening?

[Wait for response.]

*Right!*

He helped to bring a person - Dorcas, also called "Tabitha" - *back to life!*

She wasn't just sick - he didn't give her any medicine:  
she was 'dead'. That's what we're told: [Acts 9:40b].

But Peter didn't panic: *he prayed*.

He prayed just like Jesus prayed at the grave of Lazarus: [Jn. 11:41b-42].

Peter was, in other words, a "copy-cat."

And that's what we're supposed to be too!

We should *imitate* Jesus, because He told us to - [Jn. 13:15].

*And have faith* - that He has the power to perform even more miracles, today,  
through us, by the power of the Holy Spirit. [Pause.]

Now, just because I have the *potential* to do the same "amazing" "signs" as Jesus  
and Peter,

this doesn't mean it is easy, or we would see people coming back to life all the  
time and every day, (which we don't).

This is because, sadly, most of us are poor "conductors" for the miracles that God  
wants to perform (for the people who need them).

[Create a simple electric circuit with the "innners" from a flashlight, some wire and  
"crocodile clips."]

In an electrical circuit, the battery / the source has the power to light this bulb, and  
it flows along these (copper) wires, which are a *very* good conductor.

The battery / the source is God, but we're not like the wires:

We're stubborn and doubtful and sinful.

We are more like this pencil - *wood*, which *resists* the electricity, so it cannot move  
from here to here.

With that in mind, I think we should pray:

Let's pray: Father God, ..., in Jesus' name, amen.

[Ask children to leave.]

Jesus was a faithful Jew.

That is to say, *one*, (most obviously), He was *ethnically* Jewish - a direct descendant of Abraham by his great grandson, Judah.

And, *two*, He was a person who *rigorously* abided by the distinctive cultural *mōrēs* and religious practices of that ("chosen") people.

Indeed, the author of *Hebrews*, (possibly Paul), tell us that Jesus performed those various, peculiar "practices" "perfectly:" [12:2];

He carried them out *flawlessly*, despite how very *onerous* they were.

Which is why, in John's gospel, He is so very *frequently* in the Holy city, Jerusalem - to do so.

This important detail is "glossed over" in the "Synoptics" - in *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke* - but the fourth gospel writer is careful to make clear the many, long trips that Christ took down to the capital, to the Temple.

This was "important" to *John* - to describe each and every visit and not conflate them for the sake of drama as the other authors - because the Messiah was expected to show this kind of slavish deference to the sacrificial cult, etcetera, as according to the Old Testament prophets:

Now, and here this gets interesting - this situation of "perfect" piety concerns a sort of "chicken and egg" question: Was Jesus obedient because He was self-consciously, systematically seeking to conform His life to the expectation of the ancient prophets;

a conformity which was necessary to demonstrate who He was: as He told the Sadducees 'in the portico of Solomon', 'the works I do in my Father's name testify to me'.

*Or*, did the prophets predict His "perfect" piety because they saw Him doing it in their visions.

Like a snake biting its tale, where is the beginning?

Let me try and put this conundrum more plainly:

did Jesus faithfully perform *all* of the various - *and many* - duties at the Temple expected of Jewish adult-males because the prophets had foreseen it, or did they foresee it because He performed them?

It's a Marty McFly-*Back to the Future* time-travel puzzle, isn't it(!)?

Either way, in *John* [chapter] ten, He was here (*this* time) for, we see, 'the festival of Dedication':[v.22]

this was a yearly rite that the priests carried out to commemorate the Temple's "cleansing" after it had been captured by the mad Seleucid tyrant, Antiochus IV, two centuries earlier.

The "Seleucids" - if you don't remember or haven't heard me say before - were the Greek family who ruled a vast empire from what is modern day south-western Turkey to the borders of Pakistan: a thick "corridor" or "belt" of territory running across the northern Middle East, from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean.

They were descended from the commander of Alexander the Great's infantry, "Seleucus," who seized the Persian throne and set himself up as a demi-god. This *absurd, vainglorious pretension - and a lot of inbreeding(!)* - meant that the family became very volatile and violent in successive generations; and Antiochus was one of the worst:

he captured Jerusalem and placed a statue to himself in the "Holy of Holies," and deliberately sacrificed pigs on its altar, knowing that they were categorized "unclean" in *Deuteronomy [14:8]* and *Leviticus [11:7]*, 'which climaxed a concerted campaign to dissolve Judaism in its conventional form and replace it with a syncretistic worship suffused with [pagan] Greek ideas and adapted to the Hellenistic world.'<sup>[n.1]</sup>

There followed a successful, *brutal* war of rebellion by the Jews, including terrorist reprisals for this 'abomination [of] desolation'.<sup>[Dan. 9:27]</sup>

And in gratitude to God for their (eventual) success, then, we see Jesus attending a feast-day that wasn't even mandated in "The [written] Law!"

As ever, in other words, He goes above *and beyond* normal ideas of godliness and uprightness:

He "raises the bar" higher.

Too high for (regular) mortals.

Too high for normal men and women.

Indeed, the moral standard exhibited and embodied by our Savior - the moral standard necessary if human society and the world-at-large is to flourish; if the created order-as-a-whole is to be full of justice and mercy like the water that fills the sea <sup>[see: Habakkuk 2:14 & Amos 5:24]</sup> -

*that* standard is out of our reach;

*that* standard *cannot* be attained.

As Christ said to the "the rich young man:" 'No one is good', not really: <sup>[Mk. 10:17-18]</sup>.

Not in the way that they are supposed to be.

Which is why Jesus explains to his interrogators in "the portico" that - by his 'blood' <sup>[Rev.7:14]</sup> - it is *He* who 'give[s]...eternal life' to those who follow Him like sheep, <sup>[Jn. 10:28]</sup> to those who ask for it (from Him) as farm-animals look to the farmer for grain *in 'winter'*.<sup>[v.22]</sup>

In summer, of course, pastures are green;  
and streams and the brooks *flow* and so provide drink to the flocks and the herds  
as and when they want in the field.

But Jesus' presence 'in the Temple' in the (icy) *winter* has spiritual, theological  
meaning:

without Him we are frozen and starving - outside of the warmth of God's  
(paradise) shed; His (Heavenly) "barn."

We cannot fill the void in our own soul-stomachs.

The sustenance we crave as beings made in *His* image is inaccessible to us.

Although many try to find substitutes elsewhere and from others:

they lie to themselves - like Antiochus who thought he was divine - that career or  
friendship or book-knowledge or voting for the right presidential nominee or  
whatever - is satisfying; sustaining; intrinsically *meaningful*.

Jesus, however, asks us to listen to *His* voice.

And, if we're faithful in that, '[n]o one can snatch' us away, He promises: [Jn.  
10:29].

Let's take a moment to reflect.

#### Footnotes:

1. Grün, Erich S. (1993), 'Hellenism and Persecution: Antiochus IV and the Jews',  
in Green, Peter (Ed.), *Hellenistic History and Culture*, Berkeley, C. A.:  
University of California Press, pp. 238-263, 257.