

Easter 4C

April 17, 2016

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Acts 9:36-43

Peter, through power of resurrected Jesus raises Tabitha from death.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

Rev 7:9-17

The one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

John 10:22-30

The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me.

I remember being a kid and wanting God to show Himself: sitting on our front porch at night, asking for a shooting star, but there was none; asking to hear his voice, but I couldn't hear it; asking to show me a miracle – make something happen right when I ask. None of it worked.

I had to face the fact that what I was asking for was not the kind of God we have. I decided I was looking for the wrong kind of God. I had to find other ways for finding out if God is real, and here, and listening to me.

The religious leaders of Jerusalem asked Jesus, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." They wanted a particular kind of Messiah. They were looking for leadership of an insurrection against Rome; someone to lead them to victory over those who had taken over their land, their language, even some of their culture.

Jesus was not that kind of Messiah, and so they couldn't see who he was, even though the evidence was all around them. What he brought to the world was so different, they weren't even looking for it.

John was given the vision of who this Jesus is, and what kind of change he brings to us. He became THE sacrificial lamb, with so much more power than the lambs that were sacrificed in ancient Egypt, so that their blood could mark the doorposts, to protect the Israelite slaves in Egypt when God sent death to visit the unprotected households, forcing Pharaoh to set his people free. Jesus' work as our Passover Lamb has made him the shepherd of us who follow him.

As a shepherd protects his sheep from lack of food or from predators, Jesus leads us, when we arrive into his Kingdom, to a life without hunger or thirst; away from sun with scorching heat; and he even comforts us when we cry.

Well, that paints the picture of a wonderful life after this one, but what about now? Jesus said, "I have told you, and you do not believe." And "The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me." And "the Father and I are one." I read all that to say that by our seeing what he did and learning what he taught, is how we see him as he is, not as we decide we want him to be.

I started doing better at observing: I have met people who have lost a son or a parent, but felt comfort knowing that they are with God now, and God had a purpose in needing them to come home to him. I have talked with people who cannot afford a home, and live on the street, who hold onto hope that they can fix the mess they are in with the help of Jesus who they know is with them through what is happening to them. I have seen people recover from illnesses so dramatically that doctors didn't think it was possible, and amazing 'coincidences' happen (which we know are really God-incidents) that resolve huge misunderstandings, or people reconnected who thought they had lost contact with each other forever.

How do we see this God we worship?

What should we be looking for and noticing, so that we believe, and follow?

For me, it has nothing to do with shooting stars.

I have learned to be on the lookout for signs of transformation in myself and in other people. Not just change, but metanoia: a fundamental change from spiritual conversion. And so I see God at work when the sick become well;
when the angry become forgiving;
when stress gives way to a deep sense of peace;
when feeling like a victim transforms into an awareness of being blessed.

I have learned that looking for God's hand at work is found in relationships, and what motivates us, and what hope we carry in us when we most need to feel hope.

How and where do you see God? What have you witnessed that has ended the suspense of knowing how God works?

Today is called Good Shepherd Sunday. I invite you to reflect today on the relationship you have with the Good Shepherd; and whether you have looked for and seen the works in your life that prove who Jesus is for you.

Lord God, help us in our daily choice to trust and believe in the Holy Mystery of your Son. Help us hear his voice, to know his presence with us and in us, and to follow him through our decisions and words and actions. We pray in the Name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.