LECTIONARY FOR THIRD WEEK OF EASTERTIDE

 Morning Evening

Sunday, Apr 18, Easter II

1st Lesson Exodus 16:2–15 Exodus 32

2nd Lesson John 5:19–29 John 21

Monday, Apr 19

1st Lesson Deut. 8 Deut.9:1--10

2nd Lesson Acts 8:26—end Acts 9:1--31

Tuesday, Apr. 20

1st Lesson Deut. 9:11—end Deut. 10

2nd Lesson Acts 9:32—end Acts 10:1--23

Wednesday, Apr 21

1st Lesson Deut. 11:1–12 Deut. 11:13--end

2nd Lesson Acts 10:24—end Acts 11:1--18

Thursday, Apr 22

1st Lesson Deut. 12:1–14 Deut. 15:1--18

2nd Lesson Acts 11:19—end Acts 12:1--24

Friday, Apr 23

1st Lesson Deut. 16:1–20 Deut. 17:8--end

2nd Lesson Acts 12:25–13:12 Acts 13:13--43

Saturday, Apr. 24

1st Lesson Deut. 18:9--end Ezekiel 1

2nd Lesson Acts 13:44–14:7 Acts 12:25–-12:13

Sunday, St Mark’s Day (Easter III), Apr 25

1st Lesson Ecclesiasticus 51:13—end Isaiah 62:6--end

2nd Lesson Acts 25:15—end John 1:43—end

**EASTER II**

Today's Gospel has caused this Sunday to be informally dubbed “Good Shepherd Sunday.” and it is easy to select hymns appropriate to this theme. We all love the image of the Lord Jesus as the gentle and kindly shepherd. In the history of Christian art, this picture of the Saviour goes right back to the catacombs. It is clearly more ancient than other ways of visualizing Him, such as the criminal dying on a cross.

John 10 is the great “Good Shepherd” chapter of the Bible, but this theme is rooted deeply in the Old Testament. Remember that the boy David, when found by the prophet Samuel and anointed king, was keeping his father's sheep. This reminds us that the shepherd in the Bible is a kingly figure, one who rules over his sheep.

In John 10 we have all the elements of a parable. We see there the Shepherd Himself, the sheep, the fold, the door, the hirelings, the wolf, the thieves. But when John relates a parable, unlike Matthew, Mark and Luke, he does not tell a story; he simply gives us the various images for us to reflect on. The negative elements (hirelings, wolves, thieves) speak for themselves and need not detain us. John stresses for us the Shepherd Himself.

Contrary to popular impressions, it is not the gentleness of the Shepherd which John emphasizes, but rather the danger in which the Shepherd operates. The Shepherd has serious and life-threatening enemies: the wolf, the thieves and the hirelings. (Once again, we know who they are!) The Shepherd's life is in danger; the Gospels tell us more than once that they picked up stones to throw at Jesus and He knew early on in His ministry that He was destined for the Cross.

Today's Gospel, like so many, becomes clearer when we continue reading from our Bibles the following verses: “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.” Here is the word which brings the picture of the Shepherd into focus: authority. A shepherd is one who holds authority. Which brings us around to the question, what kind of sheep are we? Sheep are notoriously silly animals. Isaiah wrote (in a verse quoted in today's Epistle), "All we like sheep have gone astray, but the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." When we call Christ our Good Shepherd, let us remember that grand old hymn,

 But none of the ransomed ever knew

 How deep were the waters crossed;

 Nor how dark was the night the Lord passed through

 Ere He found His sheep that was lost.

 Out in the desert He heard its cry,

 Sick and helpless and ready to die;

 Sick and helpless and ready to di

**SAINT MARK'S DAY**

This Prayer Book Holy Day falls this year right in the middle of Eastertide, and under the Rules of Precedence it supplants the Third Sunday after Easter. That is altogether appropriate, since Mark was the human author of a Gospel. The Resurrection of Jesus is the very thing which makes the Christian message into Good News for perishing sinners, rather than just another religion for spiritual seekers.

As for Mark the man, we have a series of "maybe's." Maybe he was the man with the water jar (Mark 14:13) who guided the disciples to the Upper Room where Jesus would celebrate the Passover. Maybe he was the young man who fled away naked when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk 14:51). Maybe he was the first to write a Gospel, a claim which many modern scholars regard as a fact. (Your Rector still believes Matthew was first.) Maybe he was the founder of the Church in Egypt, a tradition which surfaced about 300 years after the time of Christ. We do know that Mark had a falling out with Paul but later became an assistant to Peter. Mark's Gospel surely seems to be Peter's memoirs.

Of greater importance, however, is the meaning of the word "Gospel" itself.

When we trace that word though the New Testament, it surely seems that Gospel was a verb before it was a noun. In Luke, at the birth of Jesus the Angel tells the shepherds, "I bring you good tidings of great joy." The Angel was evangelizing, or "gospelling" the shepherds.

This word Gospel was prominent in the vocabulary of the evil cult of the Roman emperor. The birth, coming of age, accession to his throne, or arrival in a city of every sordid tyrant were all called "Good News." So when Jesus of Nazareth, in Mark 1:14, came "heralding the Good News from God: the time is ripe and the regime of God is about to take over," He was boldly challenging the most dreadful earthly power.

When Mark described his brief book as "the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," he was preparing to tell the story of the reign of God bursting upon our sinful human environment. First Jesus conquered the demons, then He took on Caesar., and finally sin, death, and hell His only weapons were His Word and His Cross.

We began by saying that the Christian message, which Mark describes as "the Gospel of God," is not one of the world great religions, not even its highest or best or truest religion. Mark accurately portrayed the One who “came preaching” something unexpected, different, and new, the One whom Peter would confess, "Thou art the Christ." That confession, at precisely the mid-point of Mark's little book. is the essence of its message. LKW