

Year B, April 22, 2018
4 Easter
Christ Church, Mexia

Today, I'm tired. For several years I've been blaming it on old age, iron deficiency, pollution, not enough exercise, poor diet, whatever. More recently, it could be the schedule between Christmas and Easter or the rapidly coming end to the semester. But I've seen some statistics from a few years ago. If you consider that the proportions still hold, then maybe you will agree with my analogy as I share them.

The population of this country is over 200 million. Eighty-four million are retired. That leaves 116 million to do the work. There are roughly 75 million in school, which leaves 41 million to do the work. Of this total, there are 22 million employed by the federal government. That leaves 19 million of us to do the work. Four million are in the armed forces, and if you subtract the 14,800,000 who work for state and city governments, you only have 200,000 to do the work. Well, there are approximately 188,000 people in hospitals on average, so that leaves 12,000 to do the work. But 11,998 people are in prisons. So that leaves 2 people, you and me, to do the work and you're sitting here listening to me. No wonder I'm tired! Or, it could be old age – or any number of things.

Anyway, on this 4th Sunday in Easter, we have the "good shepherd" scripture in the gospel as usual, but today I want to look at what we might learn from Acts and the 23rd Psalm instead. And to do that I need to remind you of what happens before what we heard in today's reading in Acts. It is after Pentecost and the disciples, especially Peter, have been preaching – bringing the good news of Jesus, the risen Jesus. And there have been some converts. Communities of the converts have been formed, people are living together and sharing everything they have. One day, Peter and John are headed to the Temple when they encounter a man lame from birth. He is lying by the gate to the Temple, called the Beautiful Gate, and they heal him. The man, celebrating his new-found ability to walk and jump around, accompanied them into the Temple, where a crowd was drawn to them. So, Peter began preaching to them (evangelists should never waste a good crowd). Now some of the Temple leaders came upon the scene and being aggravated that Peter and John were proclaiming Christ risen in the Temple, arrested them. Then the next day, when our reading today begins, they are being questioned by the High Priest and his party.

And before I discuss the rest of the story, I need to tell you an old Chinese proverb about the fox who was captured by a tiger:

The fox said, "You can't eat me because the gods have made me the leader of all the animals." The tiger didn't believe him, of course, so the fox said, "Follow me and see if any animal challenges me."

The tiger agreed to this and followed directly behind the fox as the fox began his walk through the forest. To the tiger's amazement it turned out to be exactly as the fox had said. Not a single animal they encountered challenged the fox. Indeed, every animal they met fled in sheer panic.

After several such encounters the tiger finally agreed that the fox was the leader of the animals and let him go.

So, if you have a tiger walking behind you, it is easy to remove obstacles that oppose you. Of course, that is potentially dangerous unless the tiger is thinking like the one in the story, or really isn't hungry. Peter, on the other hand, "filled with the Holy Spirit," addresses the high priest, calling attention to the man standing before them who has been healed by Jesus. Remember, it is Jesus who heals, not Peter, not us. It is Jesus who comforts, gives courage, etc. It is Jesus standing "behind us" or the Holy Spirit who fills us, that allows us to confront adversity as told in the story of Peter in Acts, or to do the things described in the 23rd Psalm this morning. Granted, it might be easier if others could see them. But if we acknowledge or believe they are there, it should work for us.

And, if we should feel tired or weary from doing those things which we should, and it is easy to get overwhelmed by all the things that need to be done in this world, then we can rest in Jesus.

The good news of Easter is so eloquently shown throughout the 23rd Psalm, ending with the sentiment that: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives, and we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. You know? I don't feel so tired anymore.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit. Amen.