

4th Sunday in Eastertide

Acts 2:42-47; John 10:1-10; Psalm 23; I Peter 2:19-25

John 10:1-10 cannot be understood to any depth without appreciating its context, for it does not stand alone. This portion of scripture really has its origins in the story of the healing of the man born blind in 9:1-34 (in fact, 10:19-21 makes an explicit connection between Jesus' "good shepherd" discourse and the healing of that blind man). That healing brought about a major confrontation between that man and the Judean religious/political establishment who believed their control of the populace was threatened by the direct confrontation of this formerly blind beggar when they sought to minimize what Jesus had done in healing him. His statement to them, when they sought to discredit his testimony, was uncompromising: "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (9:30-33)! Their response was the fury of holding an indefensible position and knowing it. "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to lecture us" (9:34)?

Jesus, when he confirms the man in his faith commitment to the kingdom of God, joins him in confronting the religious leaders by saying, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see (i.e., people like the blind man) may see, and those who do see (i.e., Israel's religious/political leadership who are well-versed in the Mosaic Law and its Jubilee demands) may become blind" (9:39). When they protest, Jesus then states, "If you were blind, you would not have sinned. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains" (that is, "You say you understand and affirm the Mosaic Law yet you disobey all its instructions to share power with the poor and equitably distribute wealth; thus, your sin is even the more obvious and damning").

It is in the context of this confrontation of the Jerusalem political/religious establishment (the "Judeans" of John 7:13 and 19:38) that Jesus then shifts his attention to those Pharisees and priests who have taken to heart what Jesus has said and have begun to be responsive to his message and person rather than being defensive. Yet they have not publicly embraced him "for fear of the Judeans". It is to these "almost believers" that Jesus directs the "Good Shepherd" message of John 10:1-21.

In essence, the larger "Good Shepherd" message (John 10:1-21) of which today's Gospel lesson is a part (10:1-10) is an effort by Jesus to get the believing Pharisees and priests to stop "limping between two different opinions" (I Kings 18:21) and instead to unconditionally embrace Jesus and his kingdom. The argument Jesus uses to call them to make a clear-cut decision for Christ, and thus join him in his liberating work, is a metaphor about shepherds and sheep. That metaphor, as developed by Jesus, is directly built upon Ezekiel 34, and that prophet's explicit likening of the "shepherds" to the political and religious leaders of Israel.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus differentiates between himself and his ministry, over against the religious/political leaders of Israel (i.e., the "Judeans") and their intentions. To do so, he uses an image with which all of his listeners would be familiar, but we are not. When flocks would be brought in from pasture, they would be placed in a fenced enclosure called a "sheepfold". The fence or wall around the sheepfold would be quite high in order to discourage any predators

(animal or human) from scaling it. There would be only one entrance into the sheepfold, guarded by a watchman. The watchman would not be one of the shepherds, but rather a person who specialized in guarding sheepfolds.

A number of shepherds would put their sheep into the sheepfold, and they would be the only people who could gain admittance. The sheep from the many flocks, of course, would intermingle. If a shepherd wanted to gather his sheep to take them back out to pasture, he would enter the sheepfold and call his sheep. Recognizing his voice, only his sheep – and all of his sheep – would gather to him, and only his sheep would follow him out of the sheepfold. It was an uncanny reality that the sheep would never be confused by the call of another shepherd; they “knew their own”. It was to this phenomenon with which all Israelites were familiar that Jesus refers in order to make his point. Thus Jesus is saying that Jesus calls to his sheep and thus reveals himself to them, so that they come to him. He doesn’t have to force them to follow him or even to sort them out of the crowd. Rather, they already know his voice and simply respond because he has already chosen and now “calls” them to him.

In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus notes that there are two types of shepherds that care for the flock of God (Israel, God’s people). There is “the good shepherd” (i.e., Jesus, and those who openly follow him) who “lays down his life for the sheep” (10:11). And there are bad shepherds (i.e., the Judeans or priestly and pharisaical political, economic and religious leaders of Israel), who come in “only to steal and kill and destroy” (10:10). The question ultimately is, “Which kind of shepherd are you? Are you one who casts his lot with Jesus and his countercultural community? Or are you one who wants to remain associated with and benefiting from the systems” (which was exactly Ezekiel’s point – see Psalm 23 below for a fuller explanation)?

However, the text tells us that these Pharisees who so much wanted to believe and embrace Jesus’ teachings (but on their own terms) “did not understand what he was saying to them” (v. 6). His metaphor was too subtle for them, for there are none so blind as those who do not wish to see.

Thus, Jesus becomes much more direct. In four statements that are very close together, Jesus gives four “I AM” messages. Twice he says, “I am the gate (into the sheepfold)” (10:7, 9). And twice he declares “I am the good shepherd” (10:11, 14; see Psalm 23 below). Jesus declares that he – and not the Law of Moses nor the Temple worship nor even the interpretation by the Pharisees of the Law – is the entrance into wholeness of life. Only Jesus is the entrance, there is no other. So the only question is whether you Pharisees and priests recognize that entrance and accept it!

The first two “I AM” messages are used in the metaphor, “I am the gate for the sheep” (vss. 7, 9). You can’t enter Jesus’ new community of justice, equity and trusting relationship with God and each other by refusing to come through its “gate”, Jesus argues (vss. 7-10). You can’t embrace Jesus and his teaching except by making a public and uncompromising commitment, lived out in your actions and in dedication to the “beloved community”. You can’t sneak in another way, seeking to make yourself invisible and unnoticed by “the powers that be”. That reveals you to be, along with them, a “thief and bandit”, a “stranger” to the Christ’s community. You will not be listened to, trusted or even taken seriously (vss. 1-5).

Jesus therefore uses two positive and three negative images. The positive images are “gate” and “good shepherd”. The negative images are “thief”, “stranger” and “hired hand” (or “employee”). The challenge Jesus thus makes to the almost-believing Pharisees is “Will you join Jesus as he seeks to be “gate” (entrance) and “good shepherd” (redemptive sacrifice) to the world and the people of God? Or will you prove yourself “thief”, “stranger” and “hired hand” to the people by refusing to make public commitment to Jesus and the kingdom of God. How will you choose today?

Acts 2:42-47 begins with a succinct summary of the life of the Early Church. “The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (2:42). Luke, the author of Acts, then elaborates. “Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (2:43-47).

Luke presents the four primary characteristics of the life of the Early Church. First, “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching”. That is, the early church was a learning community. The leaders of the church were teaching the gospel message. The believers, all of whom were young in their relationship with Jesus (no matter what their ages might be), had the task of studying, understanding and integrating the nuances of the faith into their lifestyle, beliefs and actions. So they were on a steep learning curve, and thus gave themselves “to the apostles’ teaching”.

Second, they also devoted themselves to “fellowship”. They needed to build a life together, a life in community. The Greek word used here is “*koinonia*”, which doesn’t mean what the English word “fellowship” is commonly thought to mean – that is, “enjoying each other’s company”. The Early Church was not a “hail fellow well met” society. Rather, the word *koinonia* means “to share something with someone, to be a partner and companion”. It has a strong sense of ongoing connectedness to one another, even almost a sense of dependency upon each other. Thus, when Luke writes that the Early Church gave itself over to *koinonia*, he is saying that their life together was a shared life. That sharing, as it is developed more thoroughly in verses 43-47 was both an economic sharing (“they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need”) and a spiritual sharing (“they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts”) that was culminated in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Third, these earliest Christians devoted themselves “to the breaking of bread”. By this is not simply suggested that the Christians shared meals with each other, but that they observed the sacrament of Holy Communion. Thus, they both shared meals and shared a ritual commemoration of the Lord’s Supper (e.g., Luke 24:30-35). This early act of sharing eventually became the “*agape*” or love feast about which St. Paul wrote so extensively (e.g., I Cor. 11:17-

34). Apparently, the Christians of the first century would gather weekly to share a meal together to which each person contributed a dish (the original “pot-luck”), and that then culminated in a celebration of the Eucharist together.

Fourth, the Christians devoted themselves to “the prayers”. They were prayer-centered people, caught up in intentional conversation with God. These seasons of prayer occurred in two contexts. They prayed in their homes (that is, they not only prayed as families but the church in a given location would gather in each other’s homes for prayers – see Acts 4:23-31; 12:12-17). And they prayed “in the temple” – that is, they liberated the liturgical worship in the Temple. Likely what that meant is that the Christians would gather as a group in the temple and pray to Jesus as the Jewish worship was conducted to Yahweh (Acts 4:1-7; 12:1-5). Thus, this act of worship and prayer was a very subversive act.

Therefore, Luke informs us that the earliest Christians were engaged in four activities in the building up of their life together: learning, building a community that shared wealth and faith, celebrating Holy Communion, and praying. Along with the building of their life together, they were also centered on action toward the Jewish world: preaching the good news about Jesus of Nazareth (e.g., 2:14-36) and ministering to those in need (3:1-10) – evangelism and social action.

This is the description of the earliest Church that Luke presents to us. But to truly understand what Luke is presenting, one must keep in mind the purpose not only of the book of Acts but of the Gospel of Luke, as well. The Gospel of Luke was about presenting Jesus as the Jubilee Jesus, the Jesus who came to proclaim Jubilee to the people (Luke 4:18-19), to work for Jubilee in his working transformationally with the people (e.g., Luke 9:10-17; 13:10-17) and to call the Jewish political, economic and religious systems to accountability for refusing to practice Jubilee (e.g. Luke 20:1-47).

But what was Jubilee? The word *jubilee* literally means in Hebrew “the blowing of the Ram’s Horn”. It was a celebration based upon the sabbatical year legislation of Deuteronomy 15. Every seventh sabbatical year (once every forty-nine years, or in other words, the Sabbatical of the Sabbatical Years), jubilee was to be announced – and thus in each fiftieth year, Israel was ordered to practice jubilee (Lev. 25:8-11).

The observance of Jubilee required four actions both on the part of the people and of Israel’s political, economic and religious hierarchy. They were to allow the land to lie fallow so that it could restore itself (Lev. 25:11-12). All outstanding debts between Hebrews were to be forgiven and cancelled, and no interest on a debt could be levied between jubilees (25:25, 28, 37). All Hebrew slaves were to be set free (25:39-41). But it was the fourth stipulation that was so radical. Once every fifty years, all Israelites who had purchased the property of another Israelite within those fifty years had to return that property to the original owners at no charge (Lev. 25:13, 23, 28). Wealth, during the time of the Jewish nation lay almost entirely in the land. And at Jubilee each family was to regain its ancestral land.

In other words, Jubilee was an intentional and legislated reversal of fortune! It was Israel’s most radical vehicle to redistribute its wealth so that society could be rebalanced and neither wealth nor political power could accumulate in the hands of a self-selected few. *That* was what Jesus

was proclaiming when he read Isaiah 61 in the synagogue in Nazareth at the beginning of his ministry. And that was what he was seeking to accomplish throughout that ministry, both through his compassionate acts toward the peasants and his confrontation of the powers that be.

Of course, when Jesus came proclaiming Jubilee, it was extremely good news to the farmers, artisans and peasants of Israel. And likewise, it was extremely alarming news to the powerful, who viewed Jesus with a hostility that sprang from the very real threat that he posed to their power, wealth and their control of Israel. It made Jesus' death an inevitable consequence to that conflict. But the Gospel of Luke doesn't end with a cross but with a resurrected Christ, and the spirit of Jubilee living on through Jesus' followers.

The mission to which Jesus was called, his followers were also called. When Jesus proclaimed in Luke, "The kingdom of God is among you," he was indicating that God had already planted the seeds of the kingdom both *in us* and *in our midst* (the double meaning of the Greek in Luke 17:21). So it then becomes our responsibility as Jesus' followers to carry on the ministry he initiated. "Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, . . . cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'" (Lk. 10:8-9). And that is the message of Luke's companion work, the Acts of the Apostles.

The description of the earliest Christian community that makes up our Acts lesson for the 4th Sunday in Eastertide is told by Luke in order to demonstrate that the earliest Church was faithful to the jubilee mission of Jesus. As Jesus had built a Jubilee community among his disciples, so the earliest Christians formed their fellowship into a Jubilee community, forgiving sin (debt), freeing those oppressed by life (freed from their wealth), letting the land lie fallow (breaking bread with each other) and redistributing (sharing) their wealth. As Jesus had been faithful to God by proclaiming and acting to bring about Jubilee for the poor and the powerful, so the earliest Church was seeking to live out Jubilee in its life together (also see Acts 4:32-5:16; 11:29-30, compare I Cor. 16:1-4; II Cor. 9:1-15; Gal. 2:1-10) and to act out Jubilee in their working for social justice and in proclaiming the good news of the world's economic, political, social and spiritual liberation through the Jubilee Jesus throughout Israel (Acts 1:1-8:3), Samaria (Acts 8:4-25), the Gentile world (Acts 8:26-21:16) and finally to Rome (Acts 21:17-28:31). But unlike their Hebrew ancestors who observed Jubilee every fifty years, these earliest Jewish Christians followed the Jubilee requirements every day of every year! And unlike their ancestors who observed Jubilee out of obligation and obedience to the Law, the church followed Jubilee both with joy and out of gratitude for what God had done for them through the Jubilee Jesus (vss. 46-47)! ***That*** is what Acts 2:42-47 is all about!

And how do the people of Israel respond? "(The Christians) have the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (2:47). The people of Israel observed the way the Christians were choosing to live their life together in the voluntary obedience to Jubilee, the praise of God and the sharing of wealth. And they were impressed! Thus, these earliest Christians were following the dictum of St. Francis written 1200 years later: "Proclaim the Gospel in all you do; use words, if absolutely necessary!" The very way they chose to live in joy, the worship of God and in the sharing of their wealth impressed the ordinary people greatly!

And so the people responded. “Day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved”. The Jewish people saw this alternate way of life and the joy accompanying that alternative, and said, “We want this also”. And so they responded. God called out from the Israelite people “those who were being saved”, so that in his sovereignty, God was building the Church!

Psalm 23 continues the shepherd and sheep motif. The problem with this psalm, however, is that it is so well known that we recite it for its beauty and the comfort that it provides, rather than taking seriously its implications. So let’s look at those implications, particularly in the light of the Gospel Lesson for today.

First, the psalmist begins, “Yahweh is my shepherd.” The task of the shepherd is to both guide the sheep and to protect the sheep. It is to give direction and to provide a comprehensive vision for the sheep because otherwise, sheep will simply graze from one patch of grass to another without giving any thought to where they are going or what they might be getting themselves into. Likewise, the role of the shepherd is to protect the sheep, because they have no real defense against any who might be their “enemy” – whether human, other animals, or nature itself. Therefore, for the psalmist to declare, “Yahweh is my shepherd” is to suggest that it is in being in relationship with God that gives us both direction and protection in our lives.

What is significant about this passage, however, is that the metaphor, “shepherd” is used for God. In John 10:1-18, Jesus uses the metaphor for himself (“I am the Good Shepherd”). And so that there is no question about what Jesus is actually doing in using that metaphor for himself, he uses a linguistic term that was thoroughly unacceptable and would never be used by Jews in his day. He says “I AM the Good Shepherd”!

When Moses asked God his name, God responded “I AM WHO I AM; so tell them that I AM sent me to you” (Exodus 3:14). God’s reply is virtually impossible to translate into English, because what God did was to name himself by using an early form of the Hebrew verb “to be”, rather than a proper noun (which is what you would expect God to have used). In Hebrew, the word that would be spoken would be “Yahweh”, but that is not a name; it is a verb. The only way we can communicate into English the uniqueness of the words is to capitalize all of its letters (“I AM WHO I AM” or “I AM”). .

One would say, “Yahweh”. But by Jesus’ time, that name had become so precious that it was never spoken by a Jew, not even by the high priest. If Jews wanted to speak of God, therefore, they would combine the verbs of the name “Adonai” (“Lord”) with the consonants of “Yahweh” to get “Jehovah” (which was, consequently, a manufactured name). Because the name was sacred, no Jew would use the words “I am”; rather, they would find some other way of communicating the same thought (e.g., “He who is presently standing before you is the Good Shepherd”). Therefore, for Jesus to say, “I AM the Good Shepherd”, he would be communicating to any good Jew that he was Yahweh; he was God! What such a statement would accomplish for a Jew would be, first, utter shock, and second, immediate identification with the Psalmist’s statement in Psalm 23, “Yahweh is my shepherd!” Therefore, all that Psalm 23 would suggest of God’s being and activity toward us would automatically be transferred over

to Jesus. No wonder the political, economic and religious hierarchies of Jesus' day were offended at Jesus' words!

What is it, then, that God (Jesus) would do for Israel, for God's "sheep"? The Psalm makes two particularly powerful statements. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" (vs. 5a). "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me" (vs. 4a).

What is significant about these statements is not only what is said, but what is not said! The psalmist does not promise that God will deliver us from "the darkest valley" nor will we be delivered from "the presence of my enemies". Life will continue to have significantly dark times. And we will continue to face opposition, resistance and even hatred.

What the psalmist does promise us, however, is God's presence (Jesus' presence) in the midst of our darkest time. We will be emboldened, equipped and given perseverance to face into those dark times of oppression, domination and exploitation.

An even-more powerful metaphor is used by the psalmist in the statement, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies". But who are "my enemies"? The immediate assumption is that it is people whom the one reciting the psalm doesn't like and who don't like him or her. But it is far more than that. I would suggest that "my enemies" is the Psalmist's reference to the systems! It is Israel's political, economic and religious powerful and the structures and organizations that lay behind these powerful ones – structures and regulations used by them to keep the people under control and to take full economic and political advantage of them. It is exactly those forces in society that John refers to as "the Judeans"! And when the informed Jew reads of "my enemies" in this passage, he or she will not be able to do other than remember Ezekiel's reference to them as "evil shepherds" (Ezek. 34:1-10).

When we hear the term, "shepherds", we immediately think of the clergy "shepherding their flock" or congregation. But that was not the primary use of the word "shepherd", either in Israel or in the ancient world. The term "shepherd" was used exclusively for the political leaders of a nation (e.g., Num. 27:16-17; I Kings 22:17). So Ezekiel was making quite a statement when he wrote of the powerful leaders of Israel and of the systems through which they functioned, "Ah, you shepherds of Israel, who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? But you eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them" (34:2-4).

The Psalmist is making a profound statement by using the metaphor of God setting a table for God's people so that we can dine with God "in the presence of my enemies". He is, first, making a political statement – that those powerful in our society who the people depend upon to most have the people's interests at heart and to better their condition, are actually those who will most take advantage of the people and use them for the economic and political enhancement of the leaders themselves. The political, economic and religious leaders are the true enemies of the people. And they, like other wolves, are in our very midst! They have infiltrated our very

society, for they are at the core of our political, economic and religious systems. And they put themselves forward as our shepherds, but in reality are ravenous wolves (Ezek. 22:23-27), for they see us only as victims with whom they can take advantage!

But, second, “you prepare a table before me in the presence of (such) enemies”. The Psalmist is saying that God sets a table for his people so that they can dine with God “in the presence of these enemies”. The political, economic and religious systems will still be there, seeking to take advantage of us, trying to intimidate us with their supposed power, and thus be continuously “in our face”! But they will not conquer us who can analyze, understand and know how to thwart their abuse of power. They will not be part of the banquet. They will not be invited to share God’s bounty. They will be excluded because they choose to exclude themselves by abusing their position and by seeking to take advantage of the poor. The banquet of life will not be out of their sight. It will be in the midst of the people’s engagement in public life. That is where the obedient follower of Yahweh will be, contending for justice, equity and a Godly relational culture. And that is where God (Jesus) will be, sustaining and shepherding us to be the world-changers we are called to be!

The conclusion we must draw is this: Psalm 23 is not the fuzzy, warm, gentle psalm we emasculate it to be. It is, in reality, an extremely strong political statement, holding the systems accountable for their abuse of power, and calling God’s people to join God in being about the Godly task of shepherding the world (and its systems) into the world as God intended it to be.

I Peter 2:19-25 is the very-carefully edited Epistle Lesson for the 4th Sunday of Eastertide. It is clear that the creators of the Common Lectionary wanted to remove from this passage the most discomfiting portions of it. Yet to do so emasculates it.

This is a passage on suffering that divides into two parts. The first part (2:19-20) deals with the attitude we as Christians need to have in order to cope with our suffering. The second part (vss. 21-25) deals with Jesus’ suffering as an example of how we must be willing to suffer. But to remove verse 18 and to not include 3:1-6 is to miss the significant social commentary Peter was making as he dealt with the manner of the church’s response to the abuse of power. Instead, it turns Peter’s advice on suffering into the most banal counsel.

What Peter actually wrote (rather than what the church would have liked him to write) began with these words, “Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh” (2:18). And he ended this passage with “Wives, in the same way (as the author has advised slaves to act), accept the authority of your husbands, so that even if some of them do not obey the word (of God), they may be won over by their wives’ conduct” (3:1).

This passage is about the abuse of power by those who hold the reins of power in the Roman world (slave owners and husbands). A slave, in the Roman world, was without power or legal recourse. The owner had complete control over the slave (including the judgment of life or death), while the slave had no legal prerogatives whatsoever. Likewise, in the Roman culture of Peter’s day, marriage was perceived as a contractual relationship between the groom and the

bride's father. Marriage was not based on love; rather it was a business deal. The contract was between groom and bride's father without the bride or the bride's mother even being consulted on the matter. Therefore, the bride was perceived as chattel, owned formerly by her father and now sold to her husband. Thus, in a profound sense, the wife was as much the legal property of her husband as a slave was of his master.

If we were to do a power analysis of this situation, we would have to conclude that all the power lay in the hands of the owner or husband. No legal power lay in the hands of slave or wife, either to sue or even to negotiate. Any room for maneuverability on the part of slave or wife was room acceded by the master or husband. Therefore, the question with which Peter was wrestling was "What should be the stance of the Christian slave or wife in a relationship where they are "owned" by an unbelieving owner or husband?"

Peter's essential advice is to accept your suffering, hoping that the sweetness of your acquiescence will impress itself upon the owner or husband so that (1) they might change their behavior and act in a more compassionate or loving way toward you, and (2) they might even become converted to Christ through your example. By such an answer, Peter does not exhibit the sophistication of understanding that Paul exhibits in Eph. 5:21-6:9 (see commentary for Cycle B Ordinary Time 21) on how to exploit whatever power one does have. But he does demonstrate how to use the power of "weakness" to shame people into acting in a more just manner. Thus, he says that a slave "shames" his master into a re-evaluation of the way he is acting by "enduring" (2:19-20) his punishment when he is unjustly accused and a wife by the "purity and reverence of her life" (3:1-6).

Peter appeals to the example of Jesus for the powerless to embrace a strategy of endurance. He writes, "To this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls" (2:21-25).

When the only option open to one is to suffer, then suffer with dignity; stand tall in your suffering, Peter advises. Do not flinch, but instead have the courage to be in circumstances that would break the spirit of any other man or woman. For Jesus himself suffered unjustly, receiving upon his person the rage of the powerful and controlling. He did not flinch; he did not waver; he did not crumble. The vulnerability and the being broken that those in power longed to see exhibited by Jesus under the lash or hanging upon the cross never occurred. He died proud! And therefore, by dying proud, he witnessed to the powerful that he and not they had won! When no other alternative to exercise power is available, Peter is here teaching, then the power of the unbowed head can be exercised. And that exhibition of power, by the very fact that it is practiced, becomes redemptive to everyone else who is under that power. Thus, "by his wounds, you have been healed!" This is the power of redemptive suffering!

(Copyright © 2010 by Robert C. Linthicum)