

Sermon :: 26-Apr-2026
Easter 4, Year A

“ Grant that when we hear His *voice* ...
[we may] follow where He *leads* ”

I invite us to begin by taking a moment to express, in silent prayer, our thanksgiving and relief that the events in Washington last night did not result in violence or loss of life. (*Pause.*) Amen.

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“What does God *look* like?”

It’s a question I recall asking ... and *being* asked ... often, during my childhood. And while I haven’t actually thought about this in *years* ... while I was pondering this sermon, it brought a smile to my face to remember that ... back *then*—back when I was, say, six or seven years-old ... I actually *had* an answer—a very *specific* answer, at least in my mind’s eye: God was a very large, puffy grey *cloud*; at the left end of the cloud (*gesture with right arm*) was God’s *face*—always in profile; and that face was topped (rather incongruously, I admit!) by a *garrison cap* (or flight cap) in exactly the shape of the one worn by Sarge in the old comic strip BEETLE BAILEY (*show*). Do you remember Sarge?¹ Now, I was an avid reader of the comics ... or the “funnies,” as my family called them ... back then. And while I doubt I understood a lot of the *humor* in BEETLE BAILEY at my young age ... Sarge must have made quite an impression ... for me to have transported *his* hat onto the head of God Almighty!

One question I *don’t* ever remember asking, or *being* asked, as a child ... was what *Jesus* looked like ... no doubt, because, back then, we all *‘knew’*: Pictures of Jesus as a limpid-blue-eyed, perfectly-conditioned-blond-haired white man were in the children’s Bible I read ... on the walls of my Sunday school classrooms ... in the mouths of the ministers I heard preach² ... and deeply impressed upon the consciousness of my young faith. Jesus in His *historical* setting ... Jesus in His *cultural* context ... Jesus as an *outsider*—a member of a grudgingly-tolerated religious minority in land overlorded by a distant, pagan emperor ... Jesus as an Ancient Near-Easterner, with dark skin, dark hair and dark eyes ... eyes through which *His* world probably looked a whole lot different to *Him* [|] than *ours* does to *you* and *me*: None of this was yet on anyone’s *mind* ... not yet part of the *conversation* ... at least not in my little white, suburban 1970s world ... and more’s the *pity*.

In recent weeks, however, the question of what Jesus *looked* like ... indeed, what Jesus *looks* like ... has been unavoidably foisted upon *all* of us ... under circumstances so *unbelievable* ... not to say *ludicrous* ... that I need not rehearse them for you *here*. Perhaps it suffices to remind ourselves that

¹ His full name is Sgt Orville P Snorkel, from Pork Corners, Kansas. If you don’t remember (or never saw) him, a headshot:



² I do *not* mean to imply, in any way, that the ministers who populated my childhood expressly preached that Jesus was, or ‘needed to be,’ white. They were neither firebrands nor overt racists. I merely refer to the comfortable, self-referential, unquestioning ethos of the mainline Church in which I grew up.

it's *we* who are created in *God's* image (Gen 1:27) ... and not *VICE-VERSA*. If one's image of one's Lord and Savior bears an uncanny resemblance to *oneself* ... then one's *ego* may finally have consumed all the oxygen of one's *faith*.

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But maybe the question of *God's looks* ... of *Jesus' appearance* ... of a child's BEETLE-BAILEY-cap-on-a-cloud or an egomaniac's perfectly sprayed coiffure ... isn't the *right* one ... isn't the one *Jesus* wants us to ask: For while there isn't one *single* description of what *Jesus looked* like,³ *anywhere* in the New Testament ... we get *voluminous* reports of how He *sounded*: of the virtues He preached and the inequities He scorned ... of the ideals He taught and the suffering He pitied ... of the deep conviction of His prayers and the unmerited grace of His promises. And *today*, we hear not only *Jesus' words* ... but *also*, how He wants us to *hear* Him *say* them: as the shepherd of our flock ... as the keeper—protector—of our fold ... as the trusted, providing, loving, abiding ... and, ultimately, *selfless* ... guardian of our souls ... Whose sole⁴ mission is that we—and that *all*—“may have life and have it abundantly.”

And what does that *life*—*His* life—*our* life in *Him*—look like? Well, if we really *are* the sheep of His flock and the lambs of His fold ... then, I suspect, our lives are supposed to look an awful lot like *His*: ¶*convicted-in-belief* ... yet *kind-of-heart*; ¶*secure-in-faith* ... yet *self-sacrificing-in-spirit*; ¶*idealistic-in-mission* ... yet *practical-in-execution*; ¶*level-headed-in-living* ... yet *loving-minded-in-understanding* ... in overlooking ... in sharing ... in forgiving; ¶*hard-boiled-in-awareness* ... yet *heaven-ward-in-hope*.

Indeed, on this Good Shepherd Sunday,⁵ this is the image we get of the lives of some of *Jesus' very earliest* sheep ... a flock of some of His *first* lambs ... as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. After being baptized by the Apostles, they're living a *common* life ... a life *together* ... a life of mutual *regard* and mutual *care*.

- Hearing *Jesus*, they bankrupt whatever *worldly* comfort ... whatever '*psychic* value' ... the possessions they've managed to accumulate, to-date, may bring them ... by converting them into cash ... and then distributing this to “*all*, as any ha[s] *need*.”
- Hearing *Jesus*, they turn their backs on the relentless demands of this world to '*do*' and '*produce*' and '*get ahead*' ... and choose, rather, to '*be*' and to '*be with*' ... by spending as much time together in worship and prayer as they possibly can.
- Hearing *Jesus*, they break with this world's toxic, deceptive mythology of *self-sufficiency* and *self-achievement*. They eat their meals *not* as some 'reward' for good works performed or confirmation of their being 'better' than those who can't *afford* to feed themselves ... but in gratitude to *God* for *all* *God* provides them, and seeking to share this *God-given* abundance with *others*, too.

³ *I.e.*, generally—outside extraordinary occasions like the Transfiguration, the Garden and the Crucifixion; and even then, we get descriptions of only the *unusuality* of how He looks during these fleeting moments.

⁴ And, also, SOUL!

⁵ Since the revisions to the liturgy and lectionary made during the 1970s, always the Fourth Sunday of Easter.

- Hearing Jesus, they don't regard their newfound faith in Him as some special-and-excluding token of *chosen-ness* ... as a smug mark of moral *superiority*, to lord (!) *over* others; or of spiritual *worthiness*, to *revel* in. Rather, recognizing the mercy and grace ... the love and compassion ... the Good Shepherd has showered upon *them* ... they seek, as His flock, to show *others* exactly the *same*, in his Name.⁶

And the *outcome* of all this docile *sheepliness* ... of all this habitual *Shepherd-following* ... you might ask? "Day by day," St Luke tells us, "the Lord *added* to their number."

How, I wonder, might Jesus the Good Shepherd be calling *us*, by name ... to do the *same*?

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In the end, there is no one true *look* ... no one controlling or definitive *image* ... of God: either God the Father *or* God the Son. As the Author of all things and the Creator of the cosmos ... God will not be stuffed into some cramped visual *box*. Jesus resists our limiting Him to our *own* likeness, alone; and He condemns our appropriating *His* image for our *own personal* glorification: *folly*, at best ... *apostacy*, at worst.

But for us Christians, there *is* one true *voice* of God ... one controlling *Word* of God ... one definitive *expression* of God's *will* ... God's *concern* ... God's *mercy* ... God's *regard* ... God's *peace* ... and God's *love*: Jesus the Good Shepherd, Whom we hear ... verse-after-verse, chapter-after-chapter ... in the gospels.

And having shepherded us *into* this life—the life that He died and was raised again to *give* us ... He also seeks to shepherd us *through* it: *listening* to His voice ... *following* His ways ... and not only *enjoying* life in Him ... but also *sharing* as *much* of it as we possibly can ... with as *many* as we possibly can ... until that glorious day we come to see what God *actually* looks like, in Heaven.

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⁶ I offer the following as a slightly better translation of Acts 2:47a than we heard in the NRSVue version: "and having goodwill toward all people" [literally, "the whole populus"]. In the Greek, there is no article (definite or indefinite) before the word for GOODWILL, and the preposition (πρός), translated in the NRSVue as OF, is more effectively translated in this instance, I believe, as TOWARD (*i.e.*, WITH REGARD TO).