

Reflections for the 4th Sunday of Easter

Acts 9:36-43

Revelation 7:9-17

John 10:22-30

Written by David McLoughlin. David is a member of Pax Christi's Nonviolence Working Group and Emeritus Fellow of Christian Theology at Newman University, Birmingham.



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Religious lives beyond exclusion.

The psalm today holds our readings together. It calls the whole of creation to joyful service of the God who Moses encountered in the burning bush. The God beyond naming, beyond idols, beyond manipulation. It calls us to remembrance of the shepherd God who would still today call a liberated people to full life. As such we are to be a sign of where full life is to be found; where the nobodies are at the centre sharing new life with God's people.

Israel and Church are to model the universal, creative and liberating will of God as they joyfully live out of the divine freedom in confidence and gratitude. The psalm sings of opening access to this living God to the wider world.

By John's Gospel the break between Synagogue and young Church was acrimonious. Yet Jesus renews the vision of the Shepherd God who gathers all the disciples and protects them. This is a renewal of the prophetic vision of Moses but has often been interpreted in an exclusive, anti-Semitic way.

But the Apocalypse blows away all exclusivism with John the Seer's vision of the peoples from every nation, race, tribe and language worshiping in freedom before the throne of God. This is all the more remarkable for being written, in a time of persecution, under an oppressive Roman imperial power.

Our readings coming from real worlds of power politics, political compromise, and religious accommodation, still provoke us to enter the original prophetic imagination of liberation and promise. There nobodies become the People of God. There a gracious space is opened into which we are to invite others freely to join us, regardless of their past, their status, or their race or colour.

Our communities and parishes are challenged to be sacraments of just such a space. May it be so.