

Credibility!

Acts 9^{36-end}; Psalm 23; Revelation 7^{9-end}; John 10²²⁻³⁰

*The Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd.
[Revelation 7¹⁷]*

Christians need to be credible as witnesses to Jesus Christ and (apart from the 'sheep' theme that runs through the readings today) it is the theme of credibility that runs through our readings today:

- ✘ Peter was a credible witness to the resurrection of Jesus when he raised Tabitha/Dorcas from the dead. Dorcas was obviously a key member of the community in Lydda and so, when they knew that Peter was near, they sent for him. It is a simple expression of a simple faith that believes that a prayer can make a difference. The result was, unsurprisingly, that **many believed in the Lord**.

I confess that I have never been called on to pray for a resurrection – and I have to admit that I am not sure that I have the faith for it (and nor does anyone else as I haven't heard of it happening – and we would).

What could make us credible is to have some urgency in our response to need or the invitation to pray – the Lydians had said, **please come to us without delay** and it then records, **Peter got up and went with them**.

- ✘ Psalm 23 is the Psalm that everyone knows. It is credible in its own right because of the comfort it brings. Yet, it is specific in what it promises – God's presence; restoration of the soul; not being alone in the darkest times and when we grieve; of not being left alone when we are threatened; of **goodness and mercy** as our companions; and that promise of eternal life – **I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever**.

Generations of Christians can testify to the fact that God hasn't let them down: it isn't that life has been perfect and without concern, it is that they are never alone and never unsupported.

- ✘ In the Revelation we encounter the army of martyrs, white robed, in heaven. Here is the incontrovertible credibility afforded to our faith by those who thought that their relationship with God through Christ was more valuable and important than their own life.

It does worry me that Christianity in this country and culture has become so soft. The days of Christians being expected to attend Church – twice – on a Sunday and to be seen carrying their Bibles; giving their tithes; etc have gone. Christians regard Christianity as a leisure activity, want to be entertained rather than challenged and have come to see the ministry as a professional Christian who does all the praying and witnessing on behalf of everyone else. Where is the credibility in that?

- ✘ That brings us to Jesus the sheep-turned-shepherd! We can depend on him and rejoice that he says **no-one will snatch [my sheep] out of my hand**. But we have to live up to the challenge – **my sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me**.

Our credibility is in being disciples, sheep of Jesus flock, who would follow him to the abattoir if he asked us to! Instead he asks us to do what he would do and love those around us as he would love them.

Faith is incredible when it is only one-way. We wouldn't stick with God if all he ever did was took from us; so, too, we can't expect God to stick with us if all we do is demand. It is the relationship that makes our faith credible and the life and vitality that springs out of that relationship.