

**Bible Study**  
**Second Sunday after Easter, Year A**  
**April 23, 2017**

**[RCL] Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31**

**Acts 2:14a, 22-32**

It is fitting that Peter's Pentecost speech comes to us on the Second Sunday of Easter. While Peter's audience had just experienced the exhilaration of the Spirit's outpouring, the church today is recovering from Easter Sunday. Peter's speech provides the rhetorical jolt needed on this "Low Sunday" that lacks the lilies, crowds, and glorious hymns from the previous week. These words are the first of thirty some speeches in the Book of Acts and, indeed, the first of the innumerable attempts by Christian leaders to explain the faith. Our task is to hear this inaugural attempt at Christian witness both as "good news" and as "new news". Attention to Peter's delivery recalls some of the precariousness of the moment: Peter's refutation of the charge of drunkenness against the apostles (omitted from the lectionary) reveals an uneasiness early in his sermon. This is then steadied by Peter's usage of Old Testament scripture, which places his effort on more familiar—and more eloquent—footing. This portion of the sermon ends on a powerful note, though, as Peter reminds the audience that "all of us are witnesses" (2.32) to Christ's resurrection. The "all" refers to both the disciples on the Pentecost stage with him as well as those celebrating 2000 years later, trying to hear the words afresh.

- What parts of Peter's speech "cut to the heart" (2.37) of the modern reader?
- How does the Church maintain the quality of its proclamation throughout the highs and lows of the calendar year?

**Psalm 16**

In the Acts reading above, Peter/Luke uses Psalm 16 to advance a Christological argument. Given that it is the only portion of the Old Testament in the lectionary, it might be fruitful to consider the verses outside that setting. The Psalm describes an intimate relationship with the Creator, as first and second person pronouns abound throughout and metaphoric imagery implies a tactile closeness. In addition, unlike the many psalms that are in response to particular suffering or trouble, Psalm 16 portrays a relationship of sustained trust. Such an interaction bestows certain blessings on the faithful—blessings that are both material and spiritual in nature. Interestingly, the word "trust" itself is never mentioned—ironically appropriate given the speaker's understanding of God's presence as one whereby "my heart teaches me, night after night" (16.7).

- What are some examples of a "goodly heritage" that God has bestowed in your life?
- Would you describe your prayer/ devotional life as comparable to verse 7, or more contingent and variegated?

**1 Peter 1:3-9**

The Epistle reading offers a different understanding of faith from Psalm 16 as the epistle author connects faith with persecution and suffering. At the time of its writing, 1<sup>st</sup> Peter would have provided comfort to Christians whose families have disowned them because of their new identity. To our modern ears, however, it provides a measure of *discomfort* about the costs associated with a life in Christ. We are wise to think deeply about the nature of suffering and the power dynamics associated with "various trials." Beyond that, for both sets of readers, the reading communicates that knowledge

of Christ indeed does not equate, necessarily, to either earthly happiness or pain. Rather, the end result of faith in Christ, is to “love him” and the “salvation of your souls.” (1.8-9)

- In the comfortable settings of Western Christianity, how should the “genuineness of faith” be appropriately “tested by fire”?

### **John 20:19-31**

The story of “doubting Thomas”, unique to John, renders yet another understanding of faith. It does so in a courtroom-like drama, familiar to the Gospel, where notions of witness and testimony are examined in a taut narrative. Attention to Thomas’ declaration in 20-28 and his strong convictions earlier in the Gospel are responsible for this, along with perhaps the humble realization that we all would likewise require tactile evidence for faith. Thomas would, in fact, make a rather poor witness in today’s courtroom. When Jesus *tells* him to put his finger in his side, Thomas has the opportunity to become the star witness for all sorts of subsequent theological and historical questions. But, due to the immediate and exclamatory nature of his answer, one doubts that he indeed followed through on Jesus’ directive. Rather, he declares a verdict similar to the one from 1<sup>st</sup> Peter: by seeing Jesus, Thomas believed in and loved him.

- When you hear/ read good news, what is your reaction?
- What prevents us from seeing God in the world around us?

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