



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Easter 2, Year B
April 8, 2018

[RCL]: Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

Acts 4:32-35

In my front yard, I have a plaque that states simply, “You are standing on Sacred Ground.” I put it there as a reminder to myself that, by virtue of God’s speaking into creation, all ground is sacred. But this week’s reading in Acts demonstrates what truly sacred ground might look like. It’s at the feet of the apostles who are giving their testimony of the Resurrection. This speech creates a space for outrageous acts of giving and receiving. It’s also a great show of unity and togetherness—they are “of one heart and soul”—that gives hope to the nascent church and, across the centuries, to us as we step together into our Easter journey.

- Where do you find sacred spaces in your life? In your church?
- What might complete unity and togetherness look like in your life? In your congregation? In society as a whole?

Psalm 133

This week’s short psalm keeps with the message of unity and togetherness from the very start. After proclaiming how good and pleasant unity is, the psalmist then describes it in some ways that may seem puzzling or uncomfortable, especially to the modern reader. First, we have the image of great quantities of oil pouring down Aaron’s beard and onto his robe (and we can imagine that, as high priest, Aaron maintained a pretty significant beard). This may have some thinking of skincare routines or robe cleaning, but it’s meant as an overwhelming image of great well-being and welcome. Aaron reaches across the centuries to welcome us into this show of unity. The second image—of dew in Mount Hermon falling on Zion—presents a geographical puzzle: Hermon is in south Lebanon, a country away from Zion. It’s an image that shows that, when we are in unity and peace, things of great unpredictability can happen.

- Where have you seen unity and togetherness create unpredictable, even unimaginable outcomes?
- What other images of great well-being and welcome, like Aaron and the oil, might we create in our lives?

1 John 1:1-2:2

Coming only a week after the celebration of Easter and the Resurrection, this week’s epistle and its apparent emphasis on sin and darkness might seem misplaced, like it would be more suitable for a

penitential Lenten Sunday, than in the light of Easter. But its emphatic opening declaration is a message of hope that reads like a transcript of the apostles' testimony of the Resurrection mentioned in Acts.

John is writing near the end of the first century C.E., and the opening kicks off a message of perseverance and focus to an embattled group of believers who might be starting to have some questions. They may also find themselves failing in their day-to-day lives to lead a life without sin. These doubts and shortcomings probably feel very familiar to our readers today. John sets the boundaries of a life without sin—one in right relationship with God—and then acknowledges the inevitability of our failures. It's only in our advocate Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice of Good Friday that we can hope to get back to—and stay in—right relationship with God.

- Where do we find ourselves “out of synch” with God’s desire for us?
- How might our church community be a model of fellowship with each other and God?

John 20:19-31

The term “belief” appears frequently in John’s Gospel. To us, it can read like a statement of affirmation, like when we say, “We believe in one God,” in the Nicene Creed. But belief, to John, is an action verb. It is an ongoing act of doing something—of being obedient to Jesus Christ. Jesus’ invitation to Thomas to touch his wounds is the physical act that Thomas needs to kick off his ongoing act of believing—of obedience. And that invitation extends to all those who believe without needing to touch that have come thereafter.

It is emphasized in the reading that the risen Christ enters twice through doors that are either locked or closed. It is both a testament to his ability to be with the disciples despite physical impediments and as a reminder, a metaphor, of Christ’s ability to reach us no matter what barriers we may put up—like when we, too, yearn for a physical sign or think we don’t need Christ’s help. This gospel reminds us that he is always there, and always speaking, “Peace be with you.”

- How might the idea of an ongoing act of believing and obeying change our life outside of the church? Within the church?
- When has Christ broken through your barriers to reach you? How might his invitation to touch his wounds help during a difficult time?

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