



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Easter, Year B
April 1, 2018

[RCL] Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; John 20:1-18

Acts 10:34-43

Peter visits Cornelius' home in response to a vision that convinces him of the expansiveness of God's message, a message that he now understands to be intended for Jew and Gentile alike. Cornelius is a centurion and a Gentile, and thus not someone with whom a pious Jew would ordinarily interact. But Peter visits anyway. Upon arrival, Peter proclaims the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection with the authority of one who witnessed all that occurred.

In the passage immediately following today's reading, the Holy Spirit falls upon the people to whom Peter is speaking, and they are baptized. Peter asks, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" There is an echo here of the story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 who asks, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" In both passages, the outsider is welcomed in.

Peter's testimony of the Easter story to outsiders underscores the universality of the Gospel message. It is to be proclaimed to all.

- Are there ways in which we limit the message of the Gospel in our own time? Are there people to whom we fail to preach?
- What might we learn if we were to see ourselves not as Peter but as Cornelius, not as the confident witness to Jesus's life and resurrection, but as the outsider seeking to understand God's ways?

Psalm 118:1-2, 14:24

Psalm 118 is a song of rejoicing and a proclamation of victory—a victory that is God's doing. "The right hand of the Lord has triumphed!" "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes."

The psalm is a song of victory—but notice that it is a surprising and unexpected victory. "The same stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." God's victory turns on that which is rejected and cast aside.

- Where do you see God acting in unexpected ways, making use of the stone which the builders have rejected?

- What would it take for us to pray with the simple joy of the psalmist, “On this day the Lord has acted; we will rejoice and be glad in it”?

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

In what is perhaps Paul’s clearest statement of the Easter story, he reminds the Corinthians of what they already know—that Christ died, was buried, and was raised. On Easter Sunday, we remind ourselves of the same thing yet again.

Pride mingles with humility as Paul describes himself as “the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle.” But apostle he is. And through the grace of God, he has worked harder than any of the other witnesses to the Resurrection to share the good news. Nonetheless, it is more important that the Gospel story be shared than that he be the one to share it.

- What do we need to remind ourselves of on this Easter Sunday? What old story do we need to hear again?
- How might we join with Paul in reminding ourselves and others of the truth of the Resurrection?

John 20:1-18

It is a familiar story. Indeed, it is the central story of the Christian faith. And yet it is a story that still has the power to shock. Christ is risen. And all is changed.

In John’s telling of Easter morning, Mary Magdalene arrives to discover the empty tomb and immediately imagines that Jesus’s body has been stolen away. She runs to find Peter and the other disciple “whom Jesus loved.” They come to investigate, but do not fully understand, and they return to their homes. It is Mary who remains at the tomb long enough to speak to the man she supposes to be the gardener.

It is only when Jesus says Mary’s name that she recognizes him for who he is.

A name is a powerful thing. We are told elsewhere in the scriptures that the God who created us and formed us also calls us by name (cf. Isaiah 43:1). When Jesus calls Mary’s name, she knows him as her teacher, and seeks to hold on to him. And he sends her out to proclaim the news of his resurrection.

- Have you ever experienced Christ’s presence in an unexpected face?
- Jesus calls Mary’s name and she recognizes him in that instant. How can we recognize the moments when God calls our own names?

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