



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Easter Day (C) April 21, 2019

[RCL] Isaiah 65:17-25; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26; John 20:1-18

Isaiah 65:17-25

When we think of the trappings of Easter—dying eggs, donning our Sunday best, singing triumphant hymns, and echoing sweet “Alleluias” to proclaim the Risen One—I doubt most of us would even consider the Old Testament lesson. In fact, Easter might be one of the Sundays of the year we pay the least amount of attention to the readings. We know the story. However, it’s worth pausing to take stock of the words of the Hebrew prophets. “I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;” “no more shall the sound of weeping be heard...or the cry of distress;” “the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox.” The vivid imagery of this passage from Isaiah captures the awesome power of a God who saves his people, a God who accomplishes even that which seems impossible. The prophet foretells God’s promise of peace, fulfillment, and longevity. As Christians, we believe that Jesus is central to God’s plan of salvation and we recognize and celebrate God’s saving work, which stretches back even before the earthly life of Jesus, to creation itself.

- How do the prophet’s words instill hope in you?
- How do the prophet’s arresting images illustrate the power of God?
- Are Isaiah’s words still relevant today?

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Here again, we see how our resurrection celebration echoes the ancient faith in God who triumphs over wrong. Often when we sit to pray the psalms, whether during the Eucharist or daily office, we encounter a range of human emotion. From sorrow, suffering, and deep grief, to joy, pleasure, and comfort, the psalms teach us that whatever mood we happen to be in, whatever headspace we might occupy, or however distracted we may be, it is always appropriate to “take it to the Lord in prayer.” Today’s psalm expresses joyful declarations of triumph and thanksgiving for the Lord’s salvation. It makes sense to recite it on Easter Sunday. Amidst the festal Eucharist, it calls to mind God’s miraculous victory amidst the ordinary backdrop of our mundane lives.

- As you pray this psalm, consider especially verse 24. How does God act in your life each day?
- Do you notice signs of God’s presence in the world around you?

1 Corinthians 15:19-26

From Paul's words in 1 Corinthians come the familiar words of the *Pascha nostrum*, the celebratory Easter anthem which many congregations will sing in place of the *Gloria* during Easter season. "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. Alleluia." Paul's words help us celebrate the resurrection, but they also represent an attempt to explain the resurrection event theologically. Just as we die daily in our sin, we are continually raised by virtue of the fact that we have been baptized into the life of Christ, who claims ultimate victory over sin and death. Paul clarifies that our hope in Christ is an eternal hope. Although our Christian hope in Jesus certainly does affect the way we live our lives even now, it also stretches beyond our earthly lives, even unto life everlasting.

- Do we only believe in Christ because of the benefits it brings us in this life?
- How does our resurrection hope affect our lives now? What does it promise for our lives to come?

John 20:1-18

What do you notice first about this famous passage from John's gospel? Perhaps it is the fear that you imagine is instilled in Mary Magdalene when she realizes that her Lord's body has been taken. Or maybe you are struck by the seemingly random detail that one disciple outruns the other. I wonder if the exact pronunciation of "Rabbouni!" tripped you up. If you are like me—and you are under no obligation to be—then you might dwell a little while longer on the fact that Mary stays at the tomb when the disciples return to their homes. The text does not explicitly tell us why she does so. We might infer from her weeping that she needs space to grieve the loss of Jesus a second time. Unlike Peter and John, she does not yet understand that he is risen, but she's about to! In the midst of her despair, Jesus comes. He comes to her right at her most vulnerable, when she least expects it, and most needs it.

- Jesus has a funny way of showing up just when we need him, especially when we do not expect him. Does the Risen One ever come to you in that way?
- Does Jesus ever surprise you by showing up just when you need him most? How do you know he is there?

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