

EASTER DAY

Year B

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Acts 10:34-43

³⁴Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every people anyone who fears him and practices righteousness is acceptable to him. ³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Commentary from Phillip Lienau

This passage is part of the story of Peter and a centurion named Cornelius. Here, Peter is speaking to Cornelius and “his relatives and close friends” (Acts 10:24). Peter and Cornelius come together because both of them have had visions. Cornelius has received a vision leading him to Peter, whereas Peter has had a vision about a new way to interpret laws about what is permitted to eat. Peter’s vision is about whether it is acceptable to include people who do not follow the law of Moses in the fellowship of the followers of Jesus – for example, Cornelius. This is why today’s passage opens thus: “God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” The second part of this passage rehearses the core doctrines about Jesus’ death and resurrection, and Jesus’ role as judge of the living and dead. It is no accident that the Easter message of resurrection and the Easter message about a God that accepts devotion from people “in every nation” belong together. Jesus’ death and resurrection changed the world forever, for everyone, not just people in one place and time, and not just for people who look, act, or think the same. The criteria are simple, and universal: fear God and do what is right.

Discussion Questions

Have you ever, like Cornelius, felt like you were on the outside? If so, how were you welcomed into fellowship? Have ever, like Peter felt like you were on the inside? If so, how might you help welcome someone on the outside into fellowship?

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; *
his mercy endures for ever.

² Let Israel now proclaim, *
"His mercy endures for ever."

¹⁴ The LORD is my strength and my song, *
and he has become my salvation.

¹⁵ There is a sound of exultation and victory *
in the tents of the righteous:

¹⁶ "The right hand of the LORD has triumphed! *
the right hand of the LORD is exalted!
the right hand of the LORD has
triumphed!"

¹⁷ I shall not die, but live, *
and declare the works of the LORD.

¹⁸ The LORD has punished me sorely, *
but he did not hand me over to death.

¹⁹ Open for me the gates of righteousness; *
I will enter them;
I will offer thanks to the LORD.

²⁰ "This is the gate of the LORD; *
he who is righteous may enter."

²¹ I will give thanks to you, for you answered me*
and have become my salvation.

²² The same stone which the builders rejected *
has become the chief cornerstone.

²³ This is the LORD'S doing, *
and it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴ On this day the LORD has acted; *
we will rejoice and be glad in it.

Commentary from Phillip Lienau

This psalm includes two familiar verses. Verse 22 is quoted by Jesus in all three synoptic gospels, and is also quoted in Acts and the first letter of Peter. Verse 24 is one of the sentences of Scripture chosen to open Morning Prayer during Easter season. The two verses are linked and together express some of the most fundamental claims of Christianity. The imagery of verse 22 is that of divine reversal, upending human expectation, expanding the horizon of our imaginations. It is meant to remind us of the unlikeliness of Moses as a potential leader, of David, the shepherd not originally included in those presented to Samuel for anointing, and most of all, of Jesus, the humble Galilean. That God sees value where people fail to see value is an evergreen reminder to us to question our assumptions about what (and especially whom) we value and why. Verse 24 collapses time, so that the "today" of the Lord's action is at once the day of the psalmist, the days of Jesus, the day of the resurrection, and today, here and now. Just as our baptism is mystically linked to both the baptism of Jesus and his death and resurrection, and every Eucharist is mystically linked to the times when Jesus breaks bread in fellowship with his disciples, so is the psalm's "this day" mystically linked to today. We may join the psalmist in proclaiming that the upending of expectations, the expanding of horizons, and the linking of divine action across time is "the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes."

Discussion Questions

How has God surprised you in your life, upending your expectations or expanding your horizons?

If resurrection is at once then and now, how might that affect how you act today?

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

15 Now I want you to understand, brothers and sisters, the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ² through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

³ For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures ⁴ and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you believed.

Commentary from Phillip Lienau

Biblical scholars date some of the letters ascribed to Paul, including 1 Corinthians, to before the writing of the Gospels as we encounter them today. This suggests that this passage may be one of the first written accounts of Christian belief about the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is important because neither Paul nor the Corinthians had an agreed-upon canon of Scripture about Jesus. All they had were stories and sayings passed from one person to the next, from one community to the next. Without a book, without church buildings as we know them today, and without structures of ministry, people either believed what they heard or not. In this context, both the beginning and end of this passage give us clues as to why, according to Paul, the Good News survives and spreads. In verse 1, Paul reminds his readers that he proclaimed the Good News to them, but then we note that there is a second step in the process: his readers received the Good News in turn. This means that it's not just about proclamation. There is something that happens in the hearts of the hearers, there is a reception that is between them and God, distinct from the proclaimer. Likewise, at the end of the passage, Paul makes no distinction between himself and the other apostles when it comes to the truth of the Good News. The message has its own authority, and its conveyance is in an important sense first and foremost because of the grace of God.

Discussion Questions

How do you proclaim the Good News in your life?

How does the grace of God affect what you believe?

John 20:1-18

20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ²So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus’s head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed, ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, ¹²and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, “Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Commentary from Phillip Lienau

Mary Magdalene is revered as the “apostle to the apostles,” because she is the first to recognize the resurrected Jesus, and in turn to proclaim this miracle to other disciples. With all due respect to Peter and the other disciple, the writer of this gospel presents us a sharp contrast between their behavior and that of Mary. Mary is the first to the tomb, and the first to tell Peter and the other disciple. When Peter and the other disciple run to the tomb, they see what is there, and then they return to their homes. But Mary remains. There is something here that the writer is suggesting about the time and focus it can sometimes take to receive revelation. Mary takes the time to come to the tomb in the first place, takes the time to consult with others, takes the time on her own to feel her grief as she stands weeping. It is because she has taken this time that she is there to meet the angels. We are not told how she reacts to the fact that they are angels. Her response to them remains completely focused on Jesus. She then takes the time to converse with the person whom she takes to be the gardener. She is, even then, ready to take more time to learn where the gardener has supposedly taken Jesus’ body and to take the body away to provide a proper burial. Throughout this, Mary has devoted her time and focus to Jesus, and it is our tradition that all Christians have Mary’s devotion to thank for the beginning of the spread of the Good News, for the beginning of the celebration of Easter.

Discussion Questions

What practices do you have (or might you develop) to set aside time and focus in your life to devote to Jesus?

Proclamation of God’s work takes courage; it is easy to be afraid of being seen as foolish. Where do you find your courage to proclaim the Good News?