



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Easter 3 (A)
April 26, 2020

RCL: Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17; 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

It can be a boring exegetical pitfall to look at the lectionary and do too much explaining about the verses that are missing from a pericope. This passage is among the best exceptions. Peter speaks to the house of Israel as one of them, and the missing verses are his whole explanation of what his audience experienced at the Pentecost. The shared nature of this experience, of the revelation itself, is integral to understanding what Peter is saying.

It is meet and right and good Greek scholarship to translate Acts 2:36 with the phrase “Jesus whom you crucified,” but every bit of Acts and of Peter’s own context gives *you* the force of *us*. History is too full of antisemitic rhetoric, and the modern world is too full of living examples of anti-Jewish hate to ignore this point. Peter doesn’t stand against the Jews and accuse *them*. Peter stands among his own house of Israel, and there, among his brothers and sisters and neighbors and kin and friends, proclaims Christ crucified and Christ risen. And those who heard did not only hear his calling on them to repent; they had the experience of the Pentecost. They experienced something marvelous, something miraculous, something utterly redemptive and saving together. We are all in this together. And we proclaim repentance, baptism, and forgiveness in the midst of our own context and community that people might be saved not by our words, but by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

- When we preach sin and forgiveness, do we include ourselves in the indictment?
- Where do our experiences and lives intersect with others, and how do we use that which is shared to proclaim the living Christ?

Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17

Realistically, there are probably some atheists in foxholes. The aphorism that implies everyone whose life is endangered turns to some hope of rescue by God also implies we really need God more in times of trouble. Psalm 116 pushes back, because it does not merely celebrate the rescue from the cords of death, the grip of the grave, but rather asks the incredibly potent question of verse 10: “How shall I repay the Lord” for what rescue I *have* had?

We need God just as much when things are going well as when we are threatened. God's promise isn't something as small and pitiable as rescue from the things that happen to be bothering us today. God's promise is something more extravagant, more incredible, more – wild. God's promise of rescue from the powers of sin and death extends out into every aspect of our lives. The Psalmist extolls the fulfilling of vows, the proclamation of salvation, the sacrifice of thanksgiving, all in the most public of ways. The cords of death can turn us inward and make us fear for only ourselves and our loved ones. But they can also turn us out of ourselves, toward others, back toward the very God who gives us life and freedom. God's promise isn't for only the moments we are most selfish and afraid. God's promise is for every breath we take.

- Why do we need God when everything is fine?
- When does healthy grief and sorrow become selfish and sinful?

1 Peter 1:17-23

Silver and gold aren't perishable. 1 Peter is a great place to point to the upended reality of God in Christ because it challenges our very assumptions about the nature of the universe. How can gold and silver—elements and minerals both—perish? Well, because they are the fleeting marks of wealth and worldly success. The richest people may indeed be rich their whole lives sometimes, but for most of the people throughout all of human history, wealth has come and gone, waxed and waned. Families and dynasties that were once in power have fallen out, empires have grown and collapsed. Every new system, every new way of ordering society, has granted some people fortune while granting other people misfortune. And except for those systems that exist at this moment, every one of them has failed. The mighty Rome executed Jesus, and though they came to profess Christ, Rome is long fallen while more people come to Christ each day.

Even in the most classical theological accounts, God has upended the world we are taught by culture and history. God has been revealed in Christ and his precious blood was worth more than anything the world has ever used to measure wealth. Every emperor and every dynasty and every owner of every vault of silver and gold will fade away, while Christ will endure forever.

- What do we value and where did we learn to value it?
- Do we think of worldly things as being forever, as having too much value?

Luke 24:13-35

Here is an extraordinary Eucharistic passage as the resurrected Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to his companions. On the road to Emmaus, these disciples stop and have what we would call communion after hearing all about the scriptures. And we only break bread at the Lord's table having had the scriptures taught to us. Our preachers most certainly weren't as comprehensive in our Liturgy of the Word as Jesus would have been on the walk to Emmaus, but they will hopefully have tried to honor and explain God's Word in the presence of God's people.

It should be comforting that faith isn't entirely about knowing what happened during Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection; not entirely about having heard another's testimony; not even entirely about understanding every bit of scripture. These disciples had every opportunity for faith in the ways we would know how to measure. But blessedly, curiously, miraculously, they didn't really know Jesus in all of those things. They knew Jesus when they'd opened their hearts to a stranger, when they'd shared a meal, when they'd offered hospitality and welcome. It was in being with someone that they came to know the risen Christ. And it is in gathering for the Eucharist, inviting strangers into our own lives, and welcoming people just because we happen upon them that we will grow in faith. It won't be because of what we know. It'll be because of what he told us to do: love one another.

- Who could we welcome to our table? Is it really *our* table?
- Can faith ever be about what we ourselves have learned or heard? Or is a community required if we are to be followers of Christ?

Sam Sheridan is interested in preaching and evangelism. He has studied Hebrew and the Old Testament with the intention of cultivating himself as a biblical preacher—though it's not totally clear any two people agree on what that means. He has served at St. Margaret's in Woodbridge and Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill in Alexandria (both in Virginia) during his time at seminary and has been able to preach almost every other week these last two years. He has also worked on a grant with the Episcopal Evangelism Society to interview Episcopal chaplains about what chaplaincy skills can be used in congregational evangelism. This started as an independent study under the Rev. Stacy Williams-Duncan as both are interested in what chaplains can teach the wider church. But Sam believes these two callings and interests are the same. Publicly or privately proclaiming the Good News in Christ isn't a charism that some people have access too while others don't. Preaching or evangelizing (or pastoral care for that matter) are skills we can learn, develop, and improve upon. And Sam would very much like to keep improving.