



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Easter 3, Year B
April 15, 2018

[RCL]: Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

Acts 3:12-19

My first thought in this problematic passage is, “Oh dear, Peter goes from calling attention to the healed man to blaming this Jewish audience for Jesus’ death.” Living in a post-Holocaust era, we know where the evil of anti-Semitism can lead. We ask, why does Peter make that inappropriate—even offensive—leap when he says, “You killed the Author of life”?

To help take the edge off, we should remember that Peter himself is a Jew, testifying to other Jews about “the God of [their] ancestors,” the Jewish God. He is pointing out that it is not “by our own power or piety” that the lame man is healed, but by the man’s “faith that is through Jesus.” When Peter says, “Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,” this applies to *anyone* who doesn’t see God’s sovereign power in the person of Jesus Christ. That could be *us*, depending on the day or the hour! We have the opportunity to see this as Peter’s invitation, even if shrouded in accusatory language, to continually recognize the power of Jesus.

- How often do you need reminding of the power of Jesus? What scripture, music, liturgies, and stories most bring you back, helping you to repent as Peter invites?

Psalm 4

I can’t think of anything more relevant to these latter days than verse 6: “Many are saying, ‘Oh, that we might see better times!’ Lift up the light of your countenance upon us, O Lord.” As the above reading from Acts suggests, so often we’re not thinking about God’s power, but rather about our own power. This psalm refocuses us, helping us start to process the reality that, were it not for divine protection, we would surely be lost. In today’s world of constant danger and instability, we hear the words of the psalmist with a special poignancy: “[F]or only you, Lord, make me dwell in safety.”

- What are the “dumb idols” and “false gods” you notice in modern life? Which are the most tempting for you?
- Can you think of a time when the Lord answered you? Was it the answer you expected?

1 John 3:1-7

This epistle elaborates on what happens when we reaffirm our adoption into God’s family as “children of God.” Of course, Jesus is the key to that adoption. When we recognize Jesus as the one “revealed to take away sins,” we are counted among those who can “purify themselves.” Without Jesus, our sins lay unredeemed – as the epistle-writer suggests, they’re a kind of “lawlessness” that has self-evident consequences. Hinduism and Buddhism have a well-known name for the cause-and-effect nature of these consequences: karma. But Jesus allows us to transcend that since by turning to him, we are putting our faith in God made flesh, who has the authority to take away sins.

In the Christian life, sin leads to a temporary blindness, which makes it possible to say that “no one who sins has either seen him or known him,” severe as it sounds. But when we turn away from sin and do what is right, we ourselves become “righteous, just as he is righteous.” It’s all about repentance.

- What is your understanding of salvation? Does it help you to think about other religions, like Hinduism or Buddhism, in order to make sense of the uniqueness of Christ’s identity?
- Do you see a danger inherent in the idea that “no one who abides in [Christ] sins”?

Luke 24:36b-48

How funny that we end our Bible study with this passage, since we’ve been talking so much about having faith in Jesus—and here, the disciples are caught off guard, “disbelieving and still wondering” whether this resurrection appearance is really happening. Even in their joy, they are having trouble coming to faith at that moment, since Jesus’ physical presence among them is so unbelievable. And in his love for them, Jesus decides to prove it to them by eating a piece of fish. He didn’t have to do that!

This final appearance of Jesus comes nearly at the end of Luke’s Gospel, right before Jesus’ ascension into heaven. Here, an early understanding of Jesus’ identity is being summarized and rehearsed, almost as if it’s just been crystallized by the community for which this gospel was made: “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” We are heirs to this very same teaching.

- Is there a moment you remember when everything about the Christian faith came together and made sense, almost as if Jesus were instructing you, like in this passage? Or was your journey in faith more gradual?

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