



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Easter Day (A)
April 12, 2020

RCL: Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-18

Jeremiah 31:1-6

Jeremiah is the weeping prophet, the wrathful prophet. His long ministry and preaching saw the destruction of his community and his whole world. And everybody hated Jeremiah. His friends abandoned him. People tried to murder him. Loved ones called him a treasonous snake. No one wanted to hear the future he envisioned. No one could imagine it. But Jeremiah burned with the Words of God. When he tried not to speak, the words burned like fire on his heart and in his bones. So, he spoke that which was beyond what anyone of his day imagined.

At first, what he said was unimaginable because God's kingdom, God's Temple, couldn't possibly fall to the Babylonians. But by chapter 31, as the people are being scattered and broken apart and driven into exile, Jeremiah's words, God's words, stagger the imagination in a whole new way. There will again be peace and dancing and joy; there will be a New Jerusalem. At every desperation—in the wake of any rage and wrongdoing—the scaffolding is already going up amidst the ash and rubble. The Jeremiah message is the Easter message; all wounds can heal, all relationships can be mended. The powers of this world cannot stop it. The cosmic powers of entropy and death cannot stop it. God's Kingdom will be built.

- What do we find impossible to imagine?
- Is it worth the derision and indignity to proclaim the Christian hope?

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

This is one of the Psalms we believe were part of the Passover celebrations for Israel; it is not an individual offering thanks and praise. Psalm 118 juxtaposes many different voices. Some lines are clearly spoken by the king, some by the priests, and some by the whole people. Every level, every order, every stratum of society is drawn together—made one—and we proclaim our thanks and praise. The whole community, all of God's people, are represented in this Passover procession.

The victory is God's. And for Christians there is another voice – Psalm 118:22 is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 21:42 and Luke 20:17. We Christians are accustomed to hearing some of this psalm from the mouth of Jesus. The victory belongs to God, and we are a trinitarian faith, so the victory also belongs to

Christ. It is Easter morn. The cross he was nailed to is empty. The tomb he was laid in is empty. Jesus is our Passover, the Paschal Lamb, and has gone well before us and all our priests and kings in the procession – and the victory is won.

- How do we proclaim the victory of Christ in a world that still suffers?
- Who in the congregation hears this psalm once a year and nothing else? How do they learn about Israel's salvation history?

Colossians 3:1-4

Blessedly, in Christ, all the lines are blurred. We live in a world built on lines in the sand—demarcations—that tell us whom to love, how to be, what is in and what is out. But Jesus regularly takes our clear lines in the sand and shows us something else, something other, something deeper going on in the world and in the cosmos. This letter to the Colossians is part of an exhortation about our baptism. The lines are blurred. We were lost and alone and unable to pull ourselves out of the darkness of sin and death – but in Jesus, we are raised.

Some bit of our very selves, our humanity, our very bodies are indissolubly bonded to the Lord God in baptism. Sin and evil aren't the final say in anything. The darkness doesn't conquer anywhere. At least, not forever. Since Christ is raised and since we are members of Christ's body, we too are raised. This isn't just at the end of all things. It is right now. We should proclaim that the promise of God's love in Christ isn't a promise about a far off victory; it's also about right now. The lines are blurred. We have already died in Christ, and we are in the most meaningful – if ineffable – ways already raised in him.

- Where are our lines in the sand that Jesus redraws or breaks apart?
- What is wrong about a theology that *only* understands a future victory of God in Christ?

John 20:1-18

In an age and culture of unprecedented change in the roles and possibilities for women, it is a sweet and fine thing to find the Gospel of John makes a woman the first evangelist twice. In chapter 4, the Samaritan woman at the well is the first person in John to be sent to her community to proclaim the Good News of God in Christ. And now after the Resurrection, it is Mary who is first to proclaim the resurrected Christ. Women couldn't even have been witnesses in Rome's legal proceedings – but in this small and relatively insignificant corner of the empire, women witnessed to Christ.

The Gospels tell the story again and again of people who, while the world would not have valued, were seen by, ministered to, and even befriended by Jesus. Whatever the facts of history that have made whole groups of people voiceless, God gives them voice again and again. In the mightiest empire, the first people to see – and be seen by – the God of all Creation are not the most powerful. God's love isn't knowable only to those at the top. God's hope isn't only shown to those who are doing fine on their own. God's beloved Son isn't given only to the people we've styled as righteous or deserving.

God's love, God's hope, God's very *self* is not rigidly doled out to those *we* expect. The Gospel messily and fantastically pours out over anyone God wants to love. Our expectations of whom that *should* be is always an idea of the world. Jesus calls by name people we would never think to call. And people whom we would never think to ask can and will point us back to God in Christ.

- From whom do we expect to hear God's message? From whom do we *not* expect to hear it?
- Why do men have an ethical duty to champion God's calling of women?

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.