



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Easter Sunday (C) **April 17, 2022**

RCL: Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 65:17-25; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Luke 24:1-12

Isaiah 65:17-25

Here, Isaiah offers us a vision of God's kingdom, both apart from and within the pain of exile and separation of which Isaiah's context may have memory. This vision seems utopian in nature, though a world that is not far away, but immanent and present to us here on earth. This vision is one that allows a young child to live out their lives to their full potential, for the elderly to flourish to a full age. In a time where our concerns of lifespan are different than the original audience of Isaiah, how might this vision of full life fit in our world today?

The reading speaks also of the people living in homes that they have built and eating food from what they have planted. What might this say about our call as stewards of God's creation and our purpose as co-creators with God? On Easter and throughout the season of Easter, this vision of new heavens and a new earth provide hope, comfort, and room for contemplation around how Jesus' death and resurrection have the capacity to make all things new, even the systems and evils of the world that might want for us to be separated from God. How might we participate in the work of renewal in an active way in our world, so that children of God live to their full potential, and we are able to flourish as stewards of God's creation?

- Where are the places in our world where individuals are not able to live into the full flourishing that God hopes for us?
- How can we, as followers of Christ, help to steward this vision from Isaiah from a lofty and far away vision to an immanent and present one? Is God looking for us to participate in this new vision? How?
- How might we participate in this vision alongside God with joy and celebration, even while carrying memories of hardship or exile of our own kinds?

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

This psalm is jubilant in the face of the Lord's triumph over death, in an appropriate celebration for Easter Sunday. The voice of the psalmist is bold and confident in its gratitude and amazement for what the Lord has done in the face of death. In this, we see the ways that death and life dwell closely together, all in the

presence of a God who desires our relationship and response. Particularly within this psalm, we can see God's preference for those whom others have cast aside, an act that is marvelous and foundational to the way we can continue to understand God's ways within the world.

- How might this selection of Psalm 118 guide you toward celebration and jubilation, in the presence of hardship or even death? What hope can this celebration provide?
- Who or what are the stones that others have rejected in our world? How have you seen God raise them up or cause them to become chief cornerstones?
- What does being saved from death or receiving God's mercy allow us the freedom to do or be for God or for God's children?

Acts 10:34-43

We live in a time that currently feels full of division and divisiveness. In this reading from Acts, Peter names that God is beyond the lines of partiality and division into which humankind often separates itself. God is accepting and welcoming of those who respect God and do what is right. What might this look like lived out? How might we feel or know we are accepted or welcomed by God? Can anything keep us from this love? Peter reflects on and affirms the narrative of Jesus in the particular way that it is shared in Luke's Gospel, from his baptism to his works, from death to resurrection.

In reminding his contextual audience of their call to preach and testify to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and similarly to Psalm 118's call to "declare the works of the Lord," Peter reminds us that we too are called to be witnesses of Jesus' presence in the world. How might we use our understanding of God's welcome and acceptance, or Jesus' death and resurrection, as a part of this call to testimony and witness?

- What might it mean for God to show no partiality to those who are called to be a witness to and spread the message of the Gospel? What does this look like in everyday life?
- Are there areas of division or divisiveness that you might seek to offer reconciliation or healing for in your life?
- On this Easter Day (or during this Easter season), how will you preach or speak of the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus?

John 20:1-18

The detailed account of Mary Magdalene's response to Easter morning in John's Gospel feels relatable in numerous ways. She notices that something is wrong or unexpected, in the stone rolled away from the tomb. She notifies others, as the duties to which she is likely there to attend to can't occur without a body. And when the others she gathers return to their homes, she remains and weeps, her grief of the last few days perhaps compiled at this moment of real, physical loss and confusion.

What we as the reader know has occurred falls outside of Mary's ability to comprehend— all that makes sense at this moment is the body of her teacher being taken, a tragedy in itself. She is asked by the two angels and then by Jesus, whom she does not yet recognize, why she is weeping. In Jesus' question of "Whom are you looking for?" is a call back to the first question Jesus asks in John: "*What are you looking*

for?” (John 1:38). Again, we as the reader of this text might be able to make this connection, but Mary does not realize to whom she is speaking until Jesus calls her by name. In hearing her name in her teacher’s voice, Mary’s eyes are opened to who this person is. Jesus encourages her to not hold on to him, for his work of ascension is not complete, but instead to turn toward her brother and sister disciples to share the good news of what she has seen. We are called to remember that part of the resurrection is letting go of what has been so that the opportunity for something new to flourish is possible.

- What are you seeking? How are you being called to be aware of the unexpected, beyond comprehension ways that the things you seek may show up in your life?
- How often are we unsure of whether or how God is speaking to us until we experience something that feels like someone we know calling our name? How does that change the way we respond?
- Are there things, both physical and ephemeral, that you attempt to hold on to that perhaps have a greater purpose in being shared?

*This Bible study was written by **Sarah Diener-Schlitt**, a seminarian at the Seminary of the Southwest.*