

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Acts 10:34-43

^{10:34} Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ--he is Lord of all. ³⁷ That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸ how 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. ³⁹ We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹ not 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. ⁴² He 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. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Commentary

Peter's sermon is an excellent example of early Christian preaching. Most sermons in Acts cover the same points, if not in the same order: how God's promises of salvation in the Hebrew Bible fulfilled in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the work of the Holy Spirit in all of this; and Jesus as judge of living and the dead. The preaching concluded with a call to repentance, belief, and the promise of forgiveness. Such personal testimony by Peter carried great impact, and it was even more powerful because of Peter's acknowledgement that he had been wrong. He now realized that God accepts not only Jews but also those of all races and nationalities who honor God and live upstanding lives.

Reflection

Are multiple conversions needed in our Christian walk? What conversions can you recall in your own lifetime? What new thing is God doing in you now?

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

^{15:1} Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of 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 have come to believe.

Commentary

Paul wrote this letter to the church at Colassae, a town east of Ephesus in Asia Minor (Turkey), having heard about false teachers there who were saying that more than faith in Christ was needed for salvation. One also needed to worship other spiritual beings, as well as follow strict dietary rules. Paul wrote to affirm that in Christ God gives all that is needed for our salvation. To follow all these other things was to be led away from salvation. As believers are baptized, they are made new with new priorities—more interested now in giving than receiving; serving than being served; loving than being loved.

Reflection

If you had to name one thing that sets a Christian apart from others, what would it be?

John 20:1-18

^{20:1} 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. ² So 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." ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to

their homes. ¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹² and 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. ¹³ They 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." ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus 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." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to 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.'" ¹⁸ Mary 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

This is John's account of the first Easter. Although Peter and John have a role here, the main character is Mary Magdalene. Before sunrise, she came to the tomb of Jesus and was shocked to see that the massive stone, which had been rolled over the tomb's entrance to keep out bandits, animals or disciples who might wish to steal his body, had been rolled away. The "other disciple" is given credit as the first to believe that Jesus had risen. However, note that it was a woman who was at the cross on Good Friday who came to the tomb on Easter Day, and became the first evangelist of the Christian faith.

Reflection

During your Good Friday days (days of sadness, disappointment, or loss), how has Easter (new life, hope and possibility) come to us? Where have we been surprised by the joy of Easter and the presence of the risen Lord?

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

^{118:1} O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!
² **Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."**

^{118:14} The LORD is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.
¹⁵ **There are glad songs of victory
in the tents of the righteous:**
"The right hand of the LORD does valiantly;
¹⁶ the right hand of the LORD is exalted;
the right hand of the LORD does valiantly."

- ¹⁷ I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the LORD.
- ¹⁸ **The LORD has punished me severely,
but he did not give me over to death.**
- ¹⁹ Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the LORD.
- ²⁰ **This is the gate of the LORD;
the righteous shall enter through it.**
- ²¹ I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.
- ²² **The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.**
- ²³ This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.
- ²⁴ **This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**