

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 3:12-19

^{3:12} When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶ And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. ¹⁷ "And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,

Commentary

The context for our passage is the healing of the crippled beggar at the Beautiful Gate outside the Temple courtyard. The healing of this man in public view of other devout Jews is undoubtedly controversial. The man's physical condition marks him as an "outsider" to the temple community. By contrast, his healing and entrance into the Temple for prayer symbolize the dawning of a messianic era when the conditions of the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind are reversed so that they too can participate in the blessings of God's kingdom (cf. Luke 7:22). The healing of this crippled man is thus a sign of fulfillment of God's bold promise that the boundaries of Israel will one day be redrawn to include all people as part of the covenant community. The healing of the crippled man identifies Peter and John – and not the Temple authorities – as part of the movement that is authorized by God to lead the restoration of Israel. In this passage, Peter was concerned that the crowd who witnessed the healing understands the nature of the apostle's spiritual authority in effecting the man's cure – their healing power was not an attribute the apostles themselves had cultivated, but came through their faith in Jesus. Peter's words to the crippled beggar – "in the name of Jesus, stand up and walk" – are words that issue in new life precisely because they are words of profound confidence in the present authority of Jesus to heal the lame, save the lost, and restore the marginalized to full community. This healing story, like most Luke tells, are "enacted parables" of God's saving grace -- sin does not cause bodily infirmity under the curse of God; instead

God's redemptive intention is to liberate people from whatever debilitates them and prevents them from enjoying the good things created for them. Peter urges "all the people" who witnessed the healing, the same people who had initially rejected Jesus by handing him over to Pilate to be crucified, to repent and believe in the healing, restorative power of Jesus.

Reflection

1. Peter urges the people to repent. What does repentance mean to you? How is it a response to who Jesus is?
2. Peter tells the crowd that, though they acted in ignorance, they rejected Jesus and killed the Author of life." Does ignorance of God and God's will for creation still lead to the rejection of Jesus and the killing of the Author of life? In what ways?

1 John 3:1-7

^{3:1} See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. ³ And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. ⁴ Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

Commentary

Who we are makes a difference in the way we live. The author of 1 John is saying that because we belong to Christ, there are certain things we choose not to do and certain ways in which we choose to live. We are God's children, and like all children, we develop the characteristics of the family. As God's children, we are called to walk in the way of Christ. It is important to understand, however, that acting in ways that are just and pure is not a condition for earning God's love. Rather, they are a response to what God has already done for us and in us. In Jewish apocalyptic thought, lawlessness is a cosmic power, something greater than the sum of its parts, a power which hates God. Righteousness, on the other hand, is the form in which God's rule over creation is revealed. The writer of 1 John sees the church's crisis within this apocalyptic framework. One can choose to be either for God or for evil, for lawlessness or for righteousness. The language is intentionally adversarial. The writer is challenging the claims of those who would tempt the church to choose the wrong way.

Reflection

1. Who we are makes a difference in the way we live. In what ways do you live differently because you are a child of God?

2. The author says we have a unique identity as children of God. What are the distinguishing characteristics of that identity? How do we develop that identity?

Luke 24:36b-48

^{24:36b} While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence. ⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you--that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things."

Commentary

Last week, we studied this same story as told by the Gospel of John. This week, we examine Luke's account of one of Jesus' most familiar post-resurrection appearances. In this account, Jesus offered two "proofs" of his resurrection. First, he showed his hands and feet to the astonished disciples. This may refer to his wounds (as in John's account) or it may simply be that he showed the visible parts of his body to the disciples as evidence that he was not a ghost. The second "proof" was that he ate in front of them. As he said, a ghost would not have flesh and bones; neither would a ghost have need of nourishment. Then, Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to understand the Scriptures. Luke clearly believed that the Scriptures are rightly understood only in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus said to the disciples "these are my words that I spoke to you...that everything written about me...must be fulfilled." In Greek, to "fulfill" means to make complete, to bring to fullness. To fulfill Scripture does not necessarily mean making a prediction come true. Scripture has to be understood in light of what it meant for the writer and the original audience. Only after we grasp that message can we look for other meanings as we bring the text into conversation with contemporary life. So when Luke says that the Scriptures are fulfilled, he means that Scripture is made complete in Jesus. We may ask what place "proofs" of the resurrection have in the Scriptures. The witness of the New Testament makes the proclamation of the resurrection credible. Something changed the disciples and sustained them through the trials they experienced. Much of their preaching centered not just on the teachings of Jesus, but also on his death and resurrection. But the resurrection is not a datum subject to empirical proof or rational verification. The disciples experienced the presence of the risen Lord, leading them to believe that he had been raised, and our individual experience of the risen Lord is the foundation of our faith. Where the Lord's physical hands and feet are no longer present, the ministry of the hands of countless saints in simple and sincere ministries continues to bear witness to the Lord's living presence.

Although he may not appear in our midst to eat broiled fish, his presence is tangible in soup kitchens, around the kitchen table, and around the altar table. We see him “in the breaking of bread.” As in the first century, so now the most convincing proof of the resurrection is the daily testimony of the faithful that the Christ still lives and the work of his kingdom continues. At their core, the appearances report the manifestation of the risen Lord to believers and their sense that he had sent them to share the good news of the resurrection of the one who had preached the coming of the kingdom. The uniqueness of the Easter message is that it invariably changes the lives of those who find themselves touched by it.

Reflection

1. Jesus said that Scripture was fulfilled in his death and resurrection. How has Scripture been fulfilled in your life? How can our lives make the Scriptures complete?
2. Is your faith in the resurrection based solely on reports you have heard from others? Or, have you had an experience of the risen Lord? Do you think it makes a difference to our faith if we have had our own Resurrection experience?

Responsive Psalter

From Psalm 4

- ^{4:1} Answer me when I call, O God of my right!
**You gave me room when I was in distress.
Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.**
- ² How long, you people, shall my honor suffer shame?
How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies?
- ³ But know that the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him.
- ⁴ When you are disturbed, do not sin;
ponder it on your beds, and be silent.
- ⁵ Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the LORD.
- ⁶ There are many who say, "O that we might see some good!
Let the light of your face shine on us, O LORD!"
- ⁷ You have put gladness in my heart more
than when their grain and wine abound.
- ⁸ **I will both lie down and sleep in peace;
for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety.**

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.**