

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

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

Commentary

This lection is chosen for Easter because it speaks of the death and Resurrection of Jesus in a compact way. The Apostle Peter delivered this brief, yet powerful, sermon in the house of a Roman centurion named Cornelius. Cornelius, along with his household, were “God-fearers”, Gentiles who worshipped the God of Israel without converting to Judaism. A major change in the growth of the early Christian movement occurs in Acts 10 and 11. Peter helps the church to see that God’s plan of salvation extends beyond Israel to all the nations of the earth. The church has spread and grown at this point throughout Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. Now they must fulfill Jesus’ call to go to “the ends of the earth.” For these Jesus-loving Jews, this meant overturning their long-held opinion of Gentiles as unclean. As Peter proclaims in the first verse of this passage, God shows no partiality.

Reflection

1. To whom would Jesus have the message of repentance and of hope in the Resurrection preached?

2. What kinds of people or groups do we tend to try to exclude today? What would it mean for us to practice Jesus' type of radical impartiality?

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 about A.D. 54 to a church he had founded three years earlier in Corinth. He wrote to address several issues within the congregation, one of the most important of which was that some members believed that they were *already* reigning with Christ in glory, and so they rejected Paul's teaching of resurrection from the dead. And – most importantly – in rejecting the basic teachings of the faith, they rejected the need to behave in a way that witnessed to the gospel. In this letter, Paul reminded them they were *not* already saved, but were *on their way* toward salvation. And he cautioned them not to lose their salvation by becoming slaves to sin. Behavior and belief are irrevocably linked: your behavior reflects your beliefs and your beliefs are reflected in your behavior. In this passage, Paul recounts the foundational Christian story – in Christ's death and resurrection, God has laid claim on God's own creatures, or to put it differently, God has loved us unlovely people. In the account at hand, Paul laces his own story into the old story – though he had once persecuted the Church, God saved him and appointed him as apostle. We can see our own lives linked to the creed in similar ways. Like Paul, we had no special merit – indeed we may have turned our backs on God's grace. Like Paul, we, too, take the tradition that we have received and we transmit it to those who follow us, not only in our retelling of that old story but, from Paul's perspective more importantly, in our living in an exemplary fashion. The old story of our salvation has a direct impact on how we behave and even more fundamentally on why we act as we do.

Reflection

1. Paul says "hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you." What core message of the "good news" do you hold firmly?

2. How does the core message of the good news influence your decisions and behavior?

John 20:1-18

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. ²So 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." ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes. ¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹²and 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. ¹³They 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." ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus 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." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus 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.'" ¹⁸Mary 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 Gospel lection has two scenes: the mystery of the empty tomb (vs. 1-10) and the first post-Resurrection appearance of Jesus (vs. 11-18). The empty tomb, by itself, is not sufficient to give rise to Christian faith. There is too much room for misunderstanding. Mary shows us the typical human response to the empty tomb – someone had moved the body. Grave-robbing was quite common in the ancient world, usually looking for valuables. However, in the case of Jesus, malicious vandalism may have been on Mary's mind, perhaps even by the Jewish or Roman authorities to prevent the gravesite of Jesus becoming a martyr's shrine. In the second scene, Mary does not recognize Jesus, for she is looking for a corpse, not a resurrected man! The whole concept of a resurrected messiah and a risen Lord was a new interpretation of Hebrew belief grounded in Christian experience. It was only when Jesus called her by name that Mary recognized Jesus.

Reflection

1. How have your faith understandings been influenced by fresh circumstances?
2. How do you encounter the living Jesus?

Responsive Psalter

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 power;
The LORD has become my salvation.
¹⁵ **There are joyous 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 chastened me sorely,
But has not given 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 has been 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.