

Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary
Readings, Commentary, and Questions for Discussion for April 21, 2019
Easter Sunday



THE READINGS

First Reading: Acts 10:34-43 *Alternative Isaiah 65:17-25*

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.”

Worth Noting: This is Peter’s speech to the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household. It is one of the speeches in Acts that summarizes the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

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.”

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.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 *Alternative: Acts 10:34-43*

- 19 If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.
20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. 21 For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; 22 for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Gospel: Luke 24:1-12 *Alternate John 20:1-18*

- 1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in, they did not find the body.
- 4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5 The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.”
- 8 Then they remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

¹² But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

CONNECTING WITH THE SCRIPTURES

Entering into the Scriptures

To live in the first century Mediterranean world where the Gospel first took root was to face life-threatening dangers regularly. Infant and maternal mortality were high. Epidemics could not be expunged with a vaccine. The rule of law was a hope, a dream – more often than not a dream deferred. Death was everywhere.

In such an environment, Christians came proclaiming something wondrous: a poor Jewish carpenter had been raised from the dead. Many of the Christians thought that the Resurrection surely must signal the imminent end of the world when God would restore righteousness. Many sought to hasten that day by bringing the Gentiles to worship the God of Israel, hence the Pauline mission.

Today's Christians read inspired speeches such as the one attributed to Peter in Acts 10 and Paul's stirring letters to his congregations and assume these words powered the growth in the community of Christ followers. In reality, such literary gems succeeded in sustaining the existing community rather than attracting converts. Just as today, the primary impetus for conversion comes not from tracts but through life-giving relationships of those who lived in loyalty to the Risen Christ. Their neighbors noticed that Christians who cared for each other, for instance, saw a dramatically higher survival rate among their ill even during mass epidemics.

Their neighbors might ask how Christians could bear to expose themselves to the desperately sick. Christians simply lived out their faith that the Resurrection foreshadows their own resurrection into life eternal. With their eye on that prize, Christians overcame fear of their own mortality. They knew they were immortal, for *Christus resurrexit, sicut dixit*: Christ has risen, just as he said. Now it was for Christians to bear fruit for God (Romans 7:4).

A Religion for Women, Orphans, and the Disabled

The earliest Christians proclaimed three things: a crucified Jew was Son of God; God raised this crucified Jew from the dead; and the credibility of this story depends on the testimony of women. For the first evangelists, the scandal of the Cross may have been no more a scandal than the role of women in the proclamation of the Resurrection.

Christianity's detractors jumped on the connection with women, ridiculing those men who would follow a religion that attracted the weakest, when society honored fierce, successful, competitors. In the 19th century, Karl Marx echoed those sentiments when he wrote "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed . . . the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people." Christianity is a sigh of and for the oppressed. Christians aspire to be the soul of soulless conditions. Not a narcotic, not a depressant, Christianity is a stimulant. Its energy and its restorative powers come from the Resurrection, from the countless witnesses to the living Christ in the midst of their lives.

Questions for Discussion

An “elevator speech” captures an idea in a few short sentences. Peter’s speech in Acts, for instance, measures 215 words, just two minutes or six floors on an elevator (with stops). What would be your elevator speech in favor of Christianity?

Can you describe one woman who had an important impact on your religious life? How did she do it? (Mothers work just fine for this question.)

For early Christians the promise of eternal life gave them the courage to care for each other. The same assurance has motivated martyrs for centuries. How does the Christian promise of eternal life motivate you?



Dennis Haugh has enjoyed working with adult seekers for over 20 years, promoting engagement with and reflection on the Scriptures. To hone his skills and burnish his credentials, he earned his PhD in Biblical Studies in the University of Denver/Iliff School of Theology joint program. He appreciates any correspondence: dennishaugh2011@gmail.com.

Unless expressly stated otherwise, all quotations from Scripture are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

“Resurrection of Christ and the Women at the Tomb” by Fra Angelico (1440/1441) via Wikimedia Commons.

Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary © 2019 Dennis Haugh. Recent postings may be accessed at <https://www.stims.net/journeying-through-the-lectionary/>.