

Scripture Readings and Sermon

April 26, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Acts 2:14a, 36–41 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

Peter ends his Pentecost sermon by stating that Jesus is both Lord and Messiah. These two terms reference the nature of Jesus as fully human as the Son of Man (Messiah) and as fully divine as the Son of God (Lord - Adonai). The result of Peter's sermon was that the people "were cut to the heart" implying that their hearts were hardened before. Peter then repeats Jesus' message of "repent, believe, the kingdom of God is at hand" as revealed through Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through his preaching, Acts records that "about three thousand persons" found salvation in Jesus. This is in contrast to "about three thousand of the people fell on that day" (Exodus 32:28) when Moses brought down the Law and found the people worshipping the Golden Calf.

Commentary on 1 Peter 1:15–23 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

While the original lectionary reading begins at verse 17, without verses 15-16 the reader may miss the obvious allusion to the Exodus story. Peter quotes Leviticus 11:45, "For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy." This connection explains why the NRSV translates *paroikias* (*among strangers*) as "exile". Building upon this reference to the exile in Egypt, Peter then links the blood of Christ with the Passover lamb which provided only a temporary reprieve from death. Jesus, destined from the foundation of the world, is far more precious for through him death permanently passes over. Unlike the "futile ways" of obedience to a written law, holiness (being set apart for God) means obedience to the "truth" who is the living Jesus. This truth is the pure expression of God's love and "genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart". To live into this love and become an physical expression of this love is the essence of being born anew.

Commentary on Luke 24:13–35 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

While there are a number of locations which claim to be Emmaus, scholars agree that the exact location remains a mystery. Most, however, agree that it is east of Jerusalem most likely on the way to Jaffa. The current location was "discovered" by the Franciscans around 1099 during the Crusades. The "walk to Emmaus" is not as important as who they met on the way to Emmaus. In this context, Emmaus becomes symbolic of the people's day to day life. The religious holiday was over and the one who was to be the Messiah was crucified. It is now time to go "back to work" that is to Emmaus. It is on the way to work that they encountered Jesus who "interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures". Jesus is not about Sunday morning but about Monday through Friday. Jesus showed them that he changes every part of their lives and not just their religious life. They were so used to the two being separated, however, that they didn't recognize Jesus until he broke the bread. Just as the centurion did not recognize Jesus as the "Son of God" until he was "broken" on the cross, it was in the breaking of the bread (the crucifixion) that the truth of Jesus is revealed. When the truth is revealed, the heart breaks open to the reality of God with us. A reality that does not just happen on the mountain tops but on the ordinary roads that take us to work and Emmaus.

Sermon "Worship and the Sermon" (*[Sermon Video](#)*)

As people are forced to worship in community differently because of the pandemic, the very nature and definition of worship is called into question. Is the community truly gathered if they are all digital? Do we truly need all the "bells and whistles" to call it worship? These questions have actually been on my mind well before the outbreak. With both the traditional and contemporary services failing to reach a younger audience, the worship committee had begun exploring what a new service might

look like and feel like. Toward this end, I ordered a new book in January called "Flow: The ancient way to do Contemporary Worship". In this book, the various authors argue that the purpose of worship is to facilitate a transformative encounter with the living God. The flow of the service should draw the congregation into a deeper awareness of God and then send them forth with a renewed sense of mission and purpose.

The scriptures this Sunday reflect this flow of worship from head, to heart, toward action. Through Peter's preaching in Acts and Jesus' encounter on the road to Emmaus, individuals are confronted with the word of God. For those at Pentecost, this encounter breaks their hardened hearts to the wrongful crucifixion of Jesus and leads them toward repentance. For the brokenhearted disciples heading toward Emmaus, this encounter warmed their hearts and gave them comfort in the midst of their grief. This is the role of the sermon. The sermon is a call to attention. The sermon should comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. Rather than being at the heart of worship, the sermon should drive the listener toward worship. Because of the time limit of both Youtube and Zoom, the sermon and the Zoom worship are at different times. Instead of feeling fractured, however, this separation allows both to serve a unique role. The sermon, like Peter, exhorts and, like the encounter on the road, weaves together the word providing both comfort and hopefully challenging. This encounter with the "truth" as 1 Peter calls it, should drive us toward worship.

If exhortation and interpretation stokes our desire to seek God in our lives, it is in worship that this encounter occurs. The people at Pentecost cried out to Peter and the disciples, "What should we do?" and when Jesus was prepared to walk on the disciples begged him to come inside and eat with them. Through song, prayer, scriptural reflection, and sacramental meals, we open not only our minds but our hearts to God's presence. We lay our brokenness at the feet of Jesus and put our faith in his grace. We welcome him into the home of our hearts and ask him to bless our daily bread. We share with him and one another our hopes (joys) and our worries (concerns) knowing that he will hold them both tenderly in the palm of his hands. This is the true nature of worship. This intimate encounter with Jesus in the company of friends has the power not only to transform our lives but the life of our community. While a great sermon may change a person's mind, a power time of worship will transform their heart. Just as mysteriously as the Holy Spirit blows into our worship, the bread is broken and Jesus is gone leaving us with a powerful sense of being loved.

It is this sense of love that we call holiness. Holiness is not about what we do but where we live. A life of holiness is a life lived in the love of God. This genuine love, as 1 Peter says, overflows into all those we encounter. It is a love that causes disciples to run all the way back to Jerusalem to share the good news. It is a love which, unlike the Law and the Golden Calf resulted in three thousand death, caused more than three thousand to find new life in Jesus Christ. This is a love that causes people to hunger for worship. This is a love that overflows in acts of mercy. To experience this love is to experience the power of God to transform the world. Christian action in loving our neighbor as ourselves and not worship is the appropriate response to God's love.