

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

*April 18, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin*

## **Commentary on Acts 3:12-19** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

After Pentecost (Acts 2), the disciples begin to manifest the gifts of the Spirit. Peter, who was not known for his wisdom, preached a sermon where over three thousand people came to believe. This event was followed by the healing of the lame man at the Temple by Peter and John made famous in the children's song. The reading today follows this manifestation of the Spirit in the healing of the lame man. Peter is quick to point out that it is not by his power but by the power of Jesus through the Holy Spirit, "why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?" Peter not only places the blame for Jesus' death on the authorities but also claims that the "name" of Jesus healed the man. If only God can heal, what new teaching is this that the name of Jesus can heal? Healing, in Jewish theology, was an outward response to spiritual forgiveness given only by God. It is not surprising that Peter and John were immediately arrested after this sermon.

Acts 3:12 "why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?"

When have you done something that has garnered praise or recognition?

Did you deserve the praise or did someone else?

Should we be praised for being "good" when only God is good?

Do we use the attention given to us to witness to our "Good" God?

How can we better witness to Christ in our lives?

## **Commentary on 1 John 3:1-7** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Following the theme from last week, John reemphasizes that Jesus has not yet been revealed but when that happens, even if we are dead, we shall be like him. We will live because he lives and we will be pure because he is pure. This portion of the letter of John then picks up on the message of the Gospel of John that Jesus is the Word. If Jesus is the Law, then there is no lawlessness in Him. To be guilty of sin is to have acted outside of the Law and therefore outside of the Body of Christ. To live in the Body of Christ is to live into the Law where there is no sin. In this way, Jesus takes away sins since he is the living Law. If we live according to Jesus then we live inside the Law and do what is right. "Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous."

1 John 3:7 "Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous."

If only Christ is righteous, how can anyone be righteous?

Do we attribute righteousness to the person or to their life in Christ?

If we do what is right, is it our selfish nature or the Holy Spirit working in us?

Is righteousness simply the light of Christ shining through us?

How can we better shine the light of Christ in our lives?

## **Commentary on Luke 24:36b-48** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The Gospel of Luke was written nearly ten years before the Gospel of John and contains the same appearance of Jesus in the locked room. For Luke, however, the gift of the Holy Spirit will not come until after the ascension he records in the second volume of the Gospel known as Acts. The issue of apostolic power and doubt in John is absent from Luke. Instead, Luke is focused on the physical resurrection of Jesus and how that resurrection is a fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures. Not only does Jesus show the disciples his hands and feet as proof that he was crucified but also asks for food. While Jesus did not need to eat, his eating was physical proof that he was not a spirit but was physically raised from the dead. Luke follows this dinner scene which is similar to John's scene on the shore of Galilee

with Jesus explaining his life and death. The words used are similar to those Luke uses to describe Jesus' conversation those who walked to Emmaus earlier in the day. This not only corroborated the witnesses of both parties but also proved that it was Jesus who appeared in both locations. The purpose for Luke is not to address issues of doubt but rather to establish the mission of the church to "witness". Luke 24:45 "he opened their minds to understand the scriptures"

Why did the disciples not understand scriptures?

Are we wiser today than all of the people who devoted their lives to scriptures in Jesus' day?

Or does wisdom come not from human intelligence but Divine enlightenment?

If understanding comes from the Holy Spirit, can we understand apart from prayer?

Do you pray the scriptures or study the scriptures?

Where does your understanding come from?

### Sermon **"Entering the Light"** ([\*Sermon Video\*](#))

At the beginning of the European Renaissance, the Italian scholar Petrarch in the 1330s referred to the time between the fall of Rome and the Renaissance as the "Dark Ages". As universities were founded and a system of logic replaced faith, the Renaissance moved into the Age of Enlightenment upon which our modern western world is founded. The "dark ages", however, were also known as the "Age of Faith" in which people looked to religious traditions and theology to explain the world. Traditions and rituals, however, can sometimes blind us to our changing world. Life is change but it is in routine that we often find comfort. God, however, is the Author of Life and not the author of routine.

When Jesus appeared in that upper room the evening of his resurrection, he forever changed how his disciples would understand the nature of their reality. Jesus opened their minds to the living Word contained in the writings of the scriptures (Old Testament). Through the power of the Spirit, scripture became a conduit through which the living God spoke directly to the disciples about the Son. Writing about "Protestant Christianity", John Dillenberger and Claude Welch wrote, "Neither the preached nor the written word was in itself the Word of God. They became the Word of God when they became alive in the heart and mind of the people through the Spirit." If the Bible is something simply to be memorized like a good guidebook or recipe, then we live in the "dark ages". But when we invite the Spirit to open our minds and hearts, Christ enlightens us so that we begin to see the world through the eyes of God. This is what happens when Jesus invites us out of our tombs and into the light.

After experiencing this enlightenment in the upper room and then fully at Pentecost, Peter could understand both the plan of God and the ignorance of the people. Rather than reinforcing that ignorance by accepting credit for healing the lame man, Peter points them to the power of faith in Jesus. As the fulfillment of God's plan and God's will, faith in Jesus is faith in the Father (see Gospel of John). It is the Father who is the Author of Life and it is the Father who heals us and raises us. Through faith in the Son, we can leave our ignorance (repent) and God will wipe our errors away. It takes a leap of faith to leave the comfort of our routine and be open to the unexpected wonders Christ will show us.

Those unexpected wonders sometimes challenges our preconceived notions about ourselves and our world. While we are not all racists, we are all prejudice. Racism, like the bondage of sin, seeks to keep people in the dark and binds us to ways of life that are destructive to ourselves and others. Prejudice, however, can both help and hinder our relationships with others. A prejudice can direct people away from situations which could be dangerous or toxic. A prejudice can also close us off to new things that God is offering and new relationships that add to an abundant life. By abiding in Christ, we have the hope that when Christ comes we will be like him. In Christ, we are given discernment to know when a bias leads us from temptation and when the bias itself is the temptation. Just as Jesus opened the minds of the disciples, our hearts must be opened to new possibilities even if those possibilities go against what we have been taught by the world. This is what it means to leave the

darkness and enter into the light. It is only when by faith we give our full hearts, minds, and bodies over to the lordship of Jesus that we might be led into the abundant life in the light.