

Scripture Readings and Sermon

April 4, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

Unlike the Letter to the Romans which some consider Paul's theological masterpiece, the Letter to the Corinthians addressed issues facing the new "church". What was the proper form of worship and how where the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be used in the church were just some of the questions facing Paul. After addressing worship, Paul turns to the question of resurrection. There was some disagreement as to the nature of the resurrection. Paul begins his response by reminding the reader of Jesus' resurrection. The promise of the resurrection is not based on our merit but on the fact that "Christ died for our sins". The resurrection is the assurance that those sins are forgiven. Paul then goes on to mention that along with the disciples, over five hundred witnessed the resurrected Jesus thus eliminating any doubts to the validity of the resurrection. Paul then ends by reemphasizing that it is not based on merit but by grace that we have been given the promise of the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 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, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures

What is of "first importance" in your life?

What does Jesus' death and resurrection means to you?

Have you shared what Jesus' death and resurrection means to you with your family?

Why is Easter important to you? Or is it?

If we try to put Christ back into Christmas, shouldn't we but his death back into Easter?

Commentary on John 20:1-18 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

The account of the Resurrection is well known but most accounts will differ because the Gospels differ slightly. How many went to the tomb? John = 1, Matthew = 2, Mark = 3, and Luke = "women". They all agree that it was early Sunday morning (after the Sabbath ended at sundown on Saturday) and the stone was rolled back. While the "women" entered the tomb and then went and told the disciples in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, in John, Mary went back for the disciples immediately. The fact that two "male" disciples in John witnessed that the tomb was empty meet the Jewish legal standard for a valid witness. While the other Gospels mention angels and Jesus speaking, the rest of John is unique. Various scholars have pondered the meaning of the burial clothes and why the head piece was separate. Was this proof that Jesus was not stolen but had risen? Or is John being more symbolic in his message? When Mary looks in, she doesn't mention seeing the clothes but rather two angels instead. Is this image meant to recall the image of the Ark of the Covenant which contained the Word of God? After Mary mistakes Jesus for a gardener and then "sees" him when he calls her by name, Jesus says not to touch him. And yet, soon after this encounter Jesus will appear in the upper room and ask Thomas to touch him. Did Jesus ascend before the "ascension" described in Acts and what does this form of ascension mean? Of all of John's gospel, the resurrection fills us with wonder and puzzlement.

John 20:1 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.

Have you ever been caught completely by surprise?

What would it be like to visit a grave of a loved one only to find an empty hole?

Would it seem like a cruel joke? Would you be angry?

What must have been the joy and relief to find out that Jesus was not gone but raised?
How can you experience that same joy today?

Commentary on Acts 10:34-43 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The resurrection is at the center of every sermon preached in the Book of Acts. This is the last of five speeches given by Peter in which he proclaims that God raised Jesus. Unlike the one given after Pentecost, this sermon by Peter is directed to a non-Jewish audience. After Peter receives his lesson from God about the nature of "uncleanliness" on a rooftop, he is called to go to Caesarea to baptize Cornelius. Cornelius tells Peter of his vision from God and Peter responds by proclaiming the story of Jesus from his baptism to his resurrection. This context also explains why Peter chose to present the crucifixion in a certain light. Peter talks of Jesus preaching against the oppression of "the devil" and not the occupying force of Rome. It is the "Jews" and those "in Jerusalem" that killed Jesus by "hanging on a tree" and not the Roman authorities who crucified Jesus. While the Jewish tradition focuses on the priesthood of Jesus, Peter speaks to the Gentile of Jesus as the "Judge of the living and the dead". Jesus is no longer simply considered a "Jewish Messiah" but the Savior of all humanity. Faith and not tradition now becomes the standard for salvation and faith shows no partiality. The message of the resurrection becomes a message of universal hope.

Acts 10:39-40 "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; but God raised him on the third day"

What does it mean to witness to the resurrection?

When death comes, how do we react?

Do we live in fear or faith?

How does the resurrection free you to live?

Sermon "Facing Our Doubts" ([Sermon Video](#))

At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus preached "Repent, believe, the Kingdom of God is at hand". That night in Jerusalem, Nicodemus wanted to know how we get to the Kingdom of God. This seems like a common question, "How do I get to heaven". Jesus, however, saw the Kingdom of God not as some future promise but a present reality for those with eyes to see and ears to hear. The question was not about getting to a place but waking up to where you are already at now. A baby is already in the world before it is born. It is simply unaware because it is encased in the mother's womb. In order to become aware of its surroundings, a baby must be born and so we also must be born again, born from above. We must leave the darkness and enveloping comfort of the womb to enter the light and endless possibilities of the Kingdom of God. As Jesus tells Peter when Peter proclaims Jesus is the Messiah, this is a gift of the Father, a revelation of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit removes our blindness if we have faith.

Those last words, "if we have faith", is the focus of these readings during this season of Lent. Paul tells us in Ephesians that it is not by any work that we are born again but by faith. Rather than resisting the contractions of grace, we must have faith that God is doing a new thing and that it will be good. For it is by faith through grace that we are born again and that same grace will enable us to grow in Christ if we continue to have faith. In what or who are we to have faith? Our institutions and our families? In ourselves and our God given talents? There is surely enough low self-esteem in this world to make children of God feel less than who they were created to be. We do need to faith that we are children of God, gifted for God's kingdom but we first must have faith in the Giver of the gifts.

Faced with the long road to the promised land, after forty years the Israelites still complained and had doubts. They were so close to the end but Moses was taking a detour and they complained bitterly enough that the LORD sent serpents as punishment. These serpents were physical representations of their fears and doubts. When they pleaded to remove the serpents, they were in

essence begging for faith. Faith in a God who was and is always present but often unseen. They knew they need faith but were too afraid to leave the darkness of their doubts and fears. The sad truth is that they were already in the promised land even in the desert. Where ever God is with us, there is the promised land, the Kingdom of God. They need to face their fears and their doubts. They needed to look upon the serpents and choose God above all. And so made a bronze serpent and placed it upon a pole.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that in order for the Holy Spirit to enter our lives so that we may be born again, we need to believe. We need to believe that God is with us and that there is more to life than what we see in the dark. We need to believe that the promised made in the scriptures are being fulfilled. We need to believe that Jesus is telling us the truth. In fact, we need to go beyond that and believe that Jesus is the Son of Man even if he is crucified on a cross. If we face the sin of our doubts and fears and choose to accept by faith Jesus, then we will become open to the Holy Spirit. If we believe, we will discover that the Kingdom of God is at hand. We must first, however, turn from the darkness and choose the light. The gift of free will given by grace enables us to choose the light or the dark. Repentance is always our choice made possible by God's grace. It is the only act required for it is through repentance that faith is expressed. The question of Lent is the question given to all God's children stuck in the darkness of wrath. Will you repent? The offer has been made. The invitation has been sent. The price has been paid. All that is required is repent and believe for the Kingdom of God is at hand.