

Scripture Readings and Sermon

April 12, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

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 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. It is by the Holy Spirit that Jesus is anointed and empowered to do good and heal "all who were oppressed by the devil". This power did not end with Jesus' death but continues through the resurrection. 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 focuses on Jesus as the "Judge of the living and the dead". The focus of the message moves from Jesus as the predicted Jewish Messiah to Jesus as God chosen to save the world. 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.

Commentary on Colossians 3:1-4 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

In 2:12, Paul argues that the Christian is buried with Christ in baptism and raised with him through faith. Therefore if we are dead in Christ than we are no longer slaves to human rituals and traditions (2:20-23). Rather than focusing on things of the world which we have died to, Paul argues in chapter 3 that we should turn our attention to the spiritual world we have been raised into through Christ. Our life is now in the risen Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father. Our actions should reflect this new spiritual reality. The desires of the flesh (v. 5) should be buried with Jesus and our life should be reoriented towards God. The ways of the temporal world which focuses on the self should be buried with the "old" person. The "new" born again Christian is one in Christ and through Christ one with all Christians. Focus on the needs and desires of the self have been replaced with concern and compassion for the entire Body of Christ on earth. It is Christ that binds us together in a common love that transcends all worldly divisions.

Commentary on Matthew 27:62-28:15 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The lectionary reading for this Easter is 28:1-10 but it is expanded because of the unique role the guards play in events as Matthew records them. It is apparent from 28:15 that a number of people in the communities Matthew was writing for believed that the disciples had rolled away the stone. Matthew, therefore, goes into detail concerning who was responsible for both sealing the tomb and rolling back the stone. With the permission of Pilate, the chief priests and the Pharisees had their own guards seal and guard the tomb. Note that in Matthew, Pilate had washed his hands of the entire matter. If it had been Roman guards, the Jewish leaders would not have been able to pay them off (12-13). Matthew's statement that the guards told the leaders also indicates that the leaders knew the truth and had deliberately chosen to spread a lie instead. If the guards did not roll the stone away, then who? Matthew records that an angel of the Lord moved the stone not for Jesus' resurrection but so the women could witness the empty tomb. Note that angel says that Jesus has already been raised and not stolen from the tomb. Jesus meets them not at the tomb but on the way back to the disciples. Matthew makes sure that his community knows that the tomb was sealed when Jesus was raised for nothing is impossible with God.

Sermon "Day of Resurrection" (*Sermon Video*)

When I had the opportunity to visit the Taize community in the late 90s, I knew very little about them or their worship style. Their approach to music as prayer and the open ended worship made a lasting impression. What also made an impression was the practice of celebrating Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Resurrection every weekend. With thousands of young adults visiting every week during the summer from all over Europe, the community lived out the central Christian message every week. The visitors got to experience the sense of community felt during that "Last Supper". Good Friday witnessed to the fact that in life we are also in the midst of death and pain. On the Day of Resurrection, visitors were shown that death and pain do not have the final word for Christ is Risen. Just as God rose Jesus from the dead, by grace we are also risen and given the chance a new life. This central message done every weekend reveals that the resurrection story is as relevant today as it was nearly 2,000 years ago.

In Matthew's retelling of the resurrection event, he makes sure to include the background story of the guards and the angel. The stone was not simply rolled into place but sealed tight so that it required an earthquake and an angel to roll the stone away. Yet despite the presence of the guards and the sealed tomb, Jesus was not there but had been raised. If an armed guard and a sealed tomb could not prevent God from overcoming death, can a pandemic stop God from giving us new life today? In his letter to the Romans, Paul says that he is convinced that absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing can stop the promise of the resurrection.

As the death toll continues to rise and friends and relatives are affected, we need now more than ever the hope of the resurrection. When Peter entered the roman household, he did not see how a Gentile could be saved. Upon witnessing the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter soon understood that not only was everything possible with God but that God's grace was poured out for all who cried out. The resurrected Jesus was not just the Messiah, the anointed savior of the Jewish people but was Lord and judge of the living and the dead. No matter what we face in life or in our death or the death of a loved one, Jesus is still Lord. Our hope and our faith rests in Jesus. Just as we have given our lives to Christ, Paul says, Christ has given us life in Him.

Just as young adults from around the world go to Taize to experience this simple message, so to did people tune in this Sunday to various forms of social media to hear the message of hope contained in the resurrection story. Greater than our national boundaries or cultural differences is the basic human desire for hope in the face of death. A face mask and social distancing does not give that hope. The best scientific advice and the simplest folk remedies do not give that hope. No institution or human power can give that hope. The hope people are longing for can only be found in the garden at an empty tomb where there was once only death but no there is life. Jesus is the resurrection and the life if we have a mustard seed of faith to believe. If God is for us who or what can stand against us? Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen Indeed!