



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Easter 3 (B)
April 18, 2021

RCL: Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

Acts 3:12-19

Today's passage from Acts is a tricky text that has contributed to Christianity's unfortunate anti-Jewish and antisemitic history of violence. From the crusades to the Holocaust to today's rise of neo-Nazism, misunderstandings of passages such as this one from Acts have led to horrific beliefs about Jewish people. In today's text, we encounter Peter and John entering the Temple to pray (notice they are two Jewish men going to pray in a sacred Jewish place) when they see a man at the gate unable to walk. After healing the man "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" the man jumps up and walks, praising God. Today's passage picks up with Peter's response to the shocked worshipers who recognized the man from the gate. Peter uses it as an opportunity to preach the good news of Christ, but in doing so, he seems to blame the Israelites to whom he is speaking: "You rejected the Holy and Righteous One," "You killed the Author of life." It's easy to see why Christians through the centuries might have looked at their Jewish neighbors suspiciously, but it is no excuse.

At issue here is not Judaism, but a certain kind of religiosity that exists in all religious traditions – a kind of religiosity that wraps itself up in piety and tradition and strangles the movement of God in the community. "Why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we made him walk?" Peter asks. Peter is speaking to some of the most pious, religious people of his day in one of the holiest places in the world, and yet the people still seem surprised when God shows up and does something miraculous, just as they were tuned out to the work God was doing in and through Jesus.

Our Jewish siblings are no more guilty of this kind of thinking than are we Christians. How often do we faithfully attend our churches each week, reciting our prayers from memory, and yet completely unaware of how God is moving? How often are we surprised when we see God working? Our tradition and piety should always point to where God is moving. We must be careful not to become so attached to them we miss out on what God is doing. So, keep praying in the temple! Keep going to church! But don't be surprised when the God you are worshipping shows up.

- What are some other passages from Scripture which have been used in anti-Jewish ways?
- Think about your own prayer practices. Have they ever become obstacles to seeing God's movement in your life?

Psalm 4

“Many are saying, ‘Oh, that we might see better times!’” Is there a line in Scripture that will resonate more in our hearts than this one, given our current context of a global pandemic? Today’s psalm is a classic one included in the Book of Common Prayer’s service of Compline – and for good reason. With its images of praying in bed and falling asleep quickly, faithful Jews and Christians have prayed it at bedtime for millennia. Sometimes as I pray these words, I think about the many times of uncertainty and crisis that have taken place through those years, and it’s comforting to know such a psalm has been passed down by those who also faced fearful nights. The psalm powerfully reminds us that when we face uncertainty in our external circumstances, we only need to draw inward to find the peace of God.

- When the world is full of chaos, what does it mean to “speak to your heart in silence upon your bed”? How might you practice these words this week?

1 John 3:1-7

What a radical idea it is that we are children of God. Just as a word starts to sound funny and loses its meaning when you say it over and over again, after 2,000 years, we sometimes lose sight of just how radical it is to be called children of God. In this passage from 1 John, the author emphasizes that to be children of God is to be lavished in God’s love and intimately tied up in the identity and fate of Jesus Christ. Think about it. If Jesus is the Son of God, and we are now called children of God, we are being likened to Jesus and invited into this holy and divine family. The author of 1 John goes so far as to say that when Jesus will be revealed again, “we will be like him.”

Theologically, this idea is in line with other Johannine books of the Bible. For example, in John 17, Jesus prays that his followers will be united, “as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us.” In Jesus Christ, the division between divine and human passes away and, as children of God, our lives are woven together in the life of the Trinity. This is the idea the early Church Father Athanasius had when he wrote in his important work *On the Incarnation*, “God became man that man might become God.” To be called children of God is not just a cute pet name—it’s the profound affirmation that because of Jesus, we have been welcomed into the family of God as participants in the divine Trinitarian life. Wow!

- What implications does being called children of God have for Christian life?
- If God is our Father and Jesus is God’s son, who is Jesus to us?

Luke 24:36b-48

Every good dinner party has two basic elements: food and conversation. Talking and eating. The two go hand-in-hand. They also happen to be the two major sections of the Eucharist. In the first half of the service, the Word is proclaimed and we hear the gospel. In the second half of the service, communion is offered and we share a meal. Most of the time, these two parts are hinged with the passing of the peace, which embodies the community of peace formed from hearing God’s word and sharing God’s body, much like the community which comes from the talking and eating of a good dinner party.

Albeit out of order, it’s no coincidence that today’s gospel passage, which features an appearance of the resurrected Jesus to his disciples, includes each of these Eucharistic elements. Jesus stands among the

disciples saying to them, “Peace be with you” (PEACE/COMMUNITY). He then shares his body with the disciples through a demonstration of its realness by eating a meal (COMMUNION/EATING). And finally, he opens the disciples’ minds to understand the scriptures so that they may be proclaimed to all nations (WORD/TALKING). Each time we participate in the Eucharist, we, like the disciples, are coming to know the risen Christ.

This morning’s passage ends with a charge: “You are witnesses of these things.” To be a witness means to share with others your experience – and that is exactly the charge with which we leave the Eucharist: “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” When we participate in the Eucharist, we are encountering the risen Christ. When we pass and receive the peace, it is the same peace that Jesus gave to his disciples in his appearance. Like the disciples, then, we too are witnesses of these things, and it is as witnesses that we go forth into the world, proclaiming the resurrected Christ.

- How does this passage mirror the story of the Last Supper in Luke 22?
- What other passages of Scriptures do you know that contain Eucharistic imagery?

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