



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Easter Day (A)
April 9, 2023

[RCL] Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-18

Acts 10:34-43

The Acts of the Apostles gives its readers a bird's-eye view of the beginnings of Christian mission work. Christ has been crucified, has died, and has risen, and his followers set about sharing the Good News of resurrection and new life through Christ to *all*. Significantly, this passage marks the inclusion of Gentiles in the church. It marks the recognition that *all* are created and beloved by God, and *all* are welcomed into Christ's Beloved Community.

That sounds well enough, but consider the early Jewish context. The Apostles (the original missionaries) and early followers of Christ are being severely persecuted; just before this passage, we witness the first Christian martyrdom, that of St. Stephen, under the authority of Saul (Acts 7:56-8:1). Saul was well known for his tireless persecution of Christian believers. So, when he converts, it takes a moment for other believers to trust him. Saul's conversion kicks off a Biblical narrative of Gentile conversions, from eunuchs to centurions, which leads us into today's passage. Peter is evangelizing to a Roman centurion named Cornelius. Peter receives a vision from Christ that emphasizes the impartiality of God's love, and he is sharing that good news with Cornelius and other Gentiles. Peter not only shares the good news of God's impartiality for all and Christ's death and resurrection for all, but the Holy Spirit *confirms* it by falling upon the very people who persecuted them—the Gentiles—and *they* become believers and are saved. All are astonished.

We encounter this astonishing narrative in our own lives every day. When convicts work for Christ alongside clergy. When convicts are called to *be* clergy. When victims forgive attackers. When persecutors repent. Just as we are tireless in our sinful nature, Christ is tireless in his love for us—*all* of us. Like Peter, Christ calls us to listen, to love, and to lean into his astonishing mission—to love and to save *all*. Isn't that what Easter is all about?

- How does this passage challenge your worldview?
- Have you ever witnessed a transformation that astonished you?

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

An endearing quality of psalms is that they offer a portal for human emotion, for one's struggle with the divine—poetic expressions of raw humanity. We express joy, pain, and anger through them. We express humility, sorrow, and thanksgiving through them. We *relate* to them. Psalms offer us the freedom to lean into our humanity and to unapologetically be truthful with ourselves and with God. David, one of the Bible's more imperfect characters and a prolific psalmist, shares with us his own humanity. We are privileged to walk alongside David through his humble beginnings, his awkward rise to leadership, his struggles with sin, and his unceasing devotion to God. *His unceasing devotion to God.*

Psalm 118 expresses that devotion. As we noted in today's reading from Acts, God's steadfast love endures, in spite of our humanity. And so, the righteous, those who believe and follow God faithfully, albeit brokenly, shall also endure. David serves as a perfectly imperfect model of this for us. In Psalm 118, David expresses to us that while we are subject to pain and rejection, and while we often falter into sin, God's love for us never falters. Each day, each moment, is a gift from God. God simply wishes for us to rejoice and be glad in it. On this day in particular, Easter Sunday, David expresses that God's love is so steadfast and unconquerable that each new moment—each new day—offers us renewed hope and opportunity to love and serve God *and* one another, and to accompany one another through the gates of God's salvation. Like David, may we rejoice and be glad in the victory of God's Love.

- Psalm 118 is an expression of thanksgiving and victory. For what is the psalmist thankful?
- When you feel strong emotions toward God, do you feel agency enough to write them down or speak them to God?

Colossians 3:1-4

We humans tend to complicate things. It seems an innate part of our humanity. Our Christian ancestors were no different. This letter, whose authorship has been historically debated, is widely attributed to the Apostle Paul—who converted from tireless anti-Christian persecutor to tireless Christian evangelist, missionary, and apostle. Paul, frustrated with the complex particularities of piety established prior to and abolished by Christ's ministry and crucifixion, writes this letter to a fledgling Christian community in Collosae (modern-day Turkey) as a means of encouragement. In his Pauline vernacular, he tells the faithful of Collosae to keep it simple and to keep it heavenward. He assures them (and us) that through Christ's death, we have died to sin; through Christ's resurrection, we as believers rise into new and everlasting life in him. Rather than focusing on the earthly preoccupations of faith, Paul urges us to focus upon heavenly grace—that which does not *perish* with use. We are saved by grace alone.

- Paul's call to ministry illuminates God's grace. Where has God's grace shone through in your life?

John 20:1-18

As we read this passage, we accompany Mary Magdalene along her pre-dawn revelatory pilgrimage to Christ's tomb. Some of us, in our own pre-dawn pilgrimage, gather in darkness to witness the resurrection of the Light of the World, the *somrise*. Like Mary, we struggle with the pain of Christ's crucifixion and the joy of his salvific victory over sin and death. It gives us hope in our own struggles with sin and death. We witness the deep faith and commitment of a marginalized woman juxtaposed against the humanly

competitive nature of two other, more centered disciples vying for their beloved—vying for Christ. Christ chooses to reveal himself to Mary first. He knows that she exists at the farthest liminal boundaries of her society, a single... Palestinian... Christian... woman, and yet she remains deeply faithful and committed to Christ's Way. *She* will be the first to witness the *sonrise*. She will be the Apostle to the Apostles. Mary was pulled in from the margins and was centered by the Divine. From the center, Mary *understood*. From the margins, Mary *proclaimed*. Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed.

- Why do you suppose Mary was the first person to see the resurrected Christ?
- Can you recall revelatory moments in your own life when you could have used the strength and courage of Mary Magdalene?
- Where do you see threads of connectivity between this day's scripture readings?

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