

EASTER 3

Year B

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Acts 3:12-19

¹²When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, "Fellow Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?" ¹³The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. ¹⁴But you rejected the holy and righteous one and asked to have a murderer given to you, ¹⁵and you killed the author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

¹⁷"And now, brothers and sisters, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. ¹⁹Repent, therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out

Commentary from Sarah Neumann

You might have heard of Christians "sharing their testimonies," either in a church setting or with friends and family outside of church. Usually, a testimony refers to the personal story and experiences that have led one to the Christian faith. In other words, it's a telling of the truth as one person has personally experienced it. In this passage, Peter is giving a kind of testimony by reminding those who are listening of the story of Jesus' life.

It's important to note that passages from Scripture like this one have been used throughout history as a way to blame Jews for the death of Christ and as justification for violence or discrimination against Jewish communities. Peter, though, would have considered himself a Jew, a fellow member of the group of "Israelites" whom he addresses. This passage then is best understood as part of a community's internal dialogue about a big and controversial event—the death and resurrection of Jesus—that has just happened in their midst.

Discussion Questions

Would you say that you have a testimony? If you were invited to offer your testimony at church, what would you want to say or share?

What are some groups that you belong to with whom you can have "insider" conversations? How do you think those conversations sound to an "outsider"?

Psalm 4

- ¹ Answer me when I call, O God, defender of my cause; *
you set me free when I am hard-pressed;
have mercy on me and hear my prayer.
- ² "You mortals, how long will you dishonor my glory;*
how long will you worship dumb idols
and run after false gods?"
- ³ Know that the Lord does wonders for the faithful; *
when I call upon the Lord, he will hear me.
- ⁴ Tremble, then, and do not sin; *
speak to your heart in silence upon your bed.
- ⁵ Offer the appointed sacrifices *
and put your trust in the Lord.
- ⁶ Many are saying, "Oh, that we might see better times!" *
Lift up the light of your countenance upon us,
O Lord.
- ⁷ You have put gladness in my heart, *
more than when grain and wine and oil
increase.
- ⁸ I lie down in peace; at once I fall asleep; *
for only you, Lord, make me dwell in safety.

Commentary from Sarah Neumann

Nobody likes being ignored. Perhaps that's the reason that giving someone the "silent treatment" is seen as such a brutal response: "Not only do I disagree, I won't even acknowledge that you exist," it says. Here, the psalmist says to God, "Please don't ignore me, I need you to hear me." The psalmist speaks with the confidence of one who has great faith in God's promises, so much so that they are affirming those truths for others and urging them to put their faith in God too. At the same time, the psalmist urges God to make good on those promises by providing for them, keeping them safe, and hearing their prayers.

Discussion Questions

Where or with whom do you "dwell in safety?"

What do you need God to know about you?

How do we know that God hears our prayers? What should we do when it feels hard or even impossible to trust that God is listening to us?

1 John 3:1-7

3 ¹See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. ³And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

⁴Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. ⁷Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

Commentary from Sarah Neumann

Over and over in Scripture, we hear the relationship between God and human beings being compared to a parent-child relationship. This metaphor demonstrates how the inspired word of Scripture uses language and examples that we can understand as a way to help us understand the nature of God and ourselves. For many, the love and care shown by a parent for their child helps us to glimpse something about God. This passage also reminds us that children often inherit (through either nature or nurture) traits of their parents. Likewise, we as Christians strive to inherit traits of our God: to purify ourselves, to have no sin, and to be righteous.

Discussion Questions

What traits did you inherit from the people who raised you?

How does Scripture help you on your journey of faith? How does it challenge you?

What metaphors would you use to describe your relationship with God?

Luke 24:36b-48

³⁶ Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” ³⁷ They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ Yet for all their joy they were still disbelieving and wondering, and he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

Commentary from Sarah Neumann

Even though some people love them, I’ve never been much for ghost stories. If ghosts are real, I think they must know to steer clear of me! That said, I can understand why the disciples would have assumed that they were seeing a ghost when Jesus appeared to them after his resurrection. After all, what would the alternative be? They had just seen Jesus arrested, crucified, and buried. It couldn’t possibly be him standing in front of them...right?

When Jesus shows them the wounds in his hands and feet, the text tells us that, “in their joy they were disbelieving.” I love this turn of phrase, which captures so well the desire of the disciples to believe that Jesus is alive once again combined with their skepticism that such a thing is possible. Jesus shows them that it’s really true by expressing that most human of needs: hunger. As he eats the piece of fish that they give him, he affirms to the disciples that he is not just with them in spirit again, but in body, too.

Discussion Questions

Jesus’ resurrection is at the very heart of the Christian faith. Why do you think it is so important that Jesus rose from the dead not only in spirit but in body too?

If you were in the room, how do you think you would have reacted? What emotions might you have felt – fear, anger, joy, something else?