

# EASTER 2

Year C

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## Acts 5:27-32

<sup>27</sup>When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, <sup>28</sup>saying, “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you are determined to bring this man’s blood on us.” <sup>29</sup>But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than any human authority. <sup>30</sup>The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup>God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup>And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.”

## Commentary from Harlowe Zefting

This lesson comes in the midst of the apostles’ ministry in Jerusalem. They have been performing wonders, healing, and teaching. They are gathering new believers and forging a communal economic system. The high priest has imprisoned the apostles, but an angel of the Lord freed them during the night and told them to resume their teaching. Now, the high priest and temple officials find Peter and the apostles teaching again in Jesus’ name, and they are popular: the police who bring them before the council of the elders of Israel have done so without violence because they fear the people will stone any who attack Jesus’ apostles. After this exchange, the council is so enraged they want to kill the apostles. A respected Pharisee urges them not to, pointing out that if this movement is human-led, it will fizzle out, but that if it is truly from God, they don’t want to be found fighting against God.

## Discussion Questions

How do you distinguish between human authority and God? How do you discern what might be God’s will, that is, what paths or callings come from God?

How can you draw strength from God to stand up for justice and do good work in the world, even when doing that work is countercultural or dangerous?

## Psalm 118:14-29

- <sup>14</sup> The Lord is my strength and my song, \*  
and he has become my salvation.
- <sup>15</sup> There is a sound of exultation and victory \*  
in the tents of the righteous:
- <sup>16</sup> "The right hand of the Lord has triumphed! \*  
the right hand of the Lord is exalted!  
the right hand of the Lord has triumphed!"
- <sup>17</sup> I shall not die, but live, \*  
and declare the works of the Lord.
- <sup>18</sup> The Lord has punished me sorely, \*  
but he did not hand me over to death.
- <sup>19</sup> Open for me the gates of righteousness; \*  
I will enter them;  
I will offer thanks to the Lord.
- <sup>20</sup> "This is the gate of the Lord; \*  
he who is righteous may enter."
- <sup>21</sup> I will give thanks to you, for you answered me \*  
and have become my salvation.
- <sup>22</sup> The same stone which the builders rejected \*  
has become the chief cornerstone.
- <sup>23</sup> This is the Lord's doing, \*  
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
- <sup>24</sup> On this day the Lord has acted; \*  
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
- <sup>25</sup> Hosannah, Lord, hosannah! \*  
Lord, send us now success.
- <sup>26</sup> Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; \*  
we bless you from the house of the Lord.
- <sup>27</sup> God is the Lord; he has shined upon us; \*  
form a procession with branches up to the  
horns of the altar.
- <sup>28</sup> "You are my God, and I will thank you; \*  
you are my God, and I will exalt you."
- <sup>29</sup> Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; \*  
his mercy endures for ever.

## Commentary from Harlowe Zefting

Psalm 118 is a thanksgiving in which the psalmist credits God with rescue and salvation. The first 13 verses include calling on the Lord from a place of distress—surrounded by enemies—and taking refuge in God, who banishes fear. The psalmist seems to make some confession for their misdeeds and sees the action of God even in their punishment. We hear how God elevates the rejected stone into the chief cornerstone, able to reverse fortunes and worthy of praise for that saving work.

The second half of v. 27, about processing with branches to the altar, might be a "ritual instruction that accidentally became part of the psalm" (New Oxford Annotated Bible, p. 871). This reminds us how long the psalms have been used to worship God, and ties our own singing, chanting, and recitation of the psalms back through generations of our faith's history.

## Discussion Questions

Do you thank God when you step out of dark periods of life, out of danger or sorrow? What role do you feel God plays in resolving bad situations?

Can you imagine singing this psalm 1000, 2000, or 3000 years ago? How does it feel to recognize that our scripture and songs of worship have been spoken by people for so long?

## Revelation 1:4-8

<sup>4</sup>John to the seven churches that are in Asia:  
Grace to you and peace from him who is and who  
was and who is to come and from the seven spirits  
who are before his throne, <sup>5</sup>and from Jesus Christ,  
the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the  
ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by  
his blood <sup>6</sup>and made us a kingdom, priests serving his  
God and Father, to him be glory and dominion  
forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>7</sup>Look! He is coming with the clouds;  
every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him,  
and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account  
of him.

So it is to be. Amen.

<sup>8</sup>“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord  
God, who is and who was and who is to come, the  
Almighty.

## Commentary from Harlowe Zefting

John’s greeting to the seven churches makes God’s power and omnipresence clear. Jesus is placed in the positions of both Caesar (ruler of the kings of the earth) and Messiah (who freed us from our sins). As the seven churches face varying levels of religious persecution in their Roman context, John is helping make theological sense of a Messiah— a figure who was supposed to free God’s people from oppression – but who, instead, was crucified. More than freeing us from worldly hardship, Jesus frees us from the cosmic forces of sin and death.

Apocalypse means “unveiling” rather than “destruction,” and the apocalyptic genre involves a glimpse into the spiritual cosmic realm that stays hidden from most humans. John reassures people who are hurting and suffering that their faith is well-placed, that God is “the Alpha and Omega... who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

## Discussion Questions

Are there times when reality seems bleak and you find yourself leaning into your faith and God for hope? What does hope in God feel like?

## John 20:19-31

<sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

<sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

<sup>30</sup>Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

### Commentary from Harlowe Zefting

We find the disciples are scared, confused, and probably unsure of what to do next. They have seen Jesus killed and either seen or heard about his tomb being empty. They’re trying to make sense of that mystery in light of what Jesus taught them about his path. Jesus shows up amid this fear and uncertainty and invites them to peacefulness – twice. Encountering Jesus does not resolve the mystery; in fact, it increases the strangeness, but it does shift the mood of the disciples from fear to joy.

This passage is infamously called “Doubting Thomas.” The Greek word we translate as “doubt,” *apistos*, means “unbelieving” or “unfaithful.” Thomas had missed out on the significant event of encountering the risen Christ when Jesus showed everyone else his hands and side. Thomas is asking to be included, to have the same experience the other disciples had, and to personally encounter Jesus. We hear Jesus permit Thomas to touch his wounds, but that Thomas believed simply from seeing. The reader of this Gospel is called to believe that Jesus rose from the dead only from hearing about it.

### Discussion Questions

What is the relationship between experiencing (seeing, touching, encountering, feeling) and believing? How does your personal experience influence your belief? How does what you learn from others influence your belief?

What helps you find peace or joy when you are feeling fear or confusion? Do you turn to God for help in finding peace and joy? How can you be open to God shifting your mood or perspective?