

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the
Third Sunday of Easter

Year B

RCL

Acts 3:12-19

Psalm 4

Luke 24:36b-48



The Collect

O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Acts 3:12-19

When Peter saw the astonishment of those who had seen the lame man healed, he addressed the people, “You 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? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of 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. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And 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.

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

Psalm 4 Page 587, BCP

Cum invocarem

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.

1 John 3:1-7

See 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. Beloved, 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. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

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

Luke 24:36b-48

Jesus himself stood among the disciples and their companions and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 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.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

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.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 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, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”

SERMON

The book of Acts relates what happened after the crucifixion. In other words, it answers the question, “So what?” Jesus was killed and rose from the dead. So what? I have to be up early tomorrow to fish. Unless the resurrection of Jesus can find me some fish, I can’t deal with that right now. It’s too theoretical. Rome may decide to hunt us all down and kill us. I can’t deal with a resurrection right now. I’m scared pea green! Jesus was killed and rose from the dead. So what?

Just before our passage today is the account of the Road to Emmaus.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

I find that intensely interesting. They invited Jesus, unrecognized, to stay with them. They made an offer of hospitality, as they should do, to this stranger they had met who had explained so much of the Scripture to them. So long as this educated stranger went unrecognized, they could learn from him, but as soon as they recognized him, the total impossibility of that recognition closed their minds and Jesus disappeared. Well? Who could blame them? Dead is dead. Dead by Roman decree is very, very dead in a very, very public way, indeed. It is time for them to learn “So, what?” so that they can be about the business to which they are called but first, they have to lose what they think they know in order to accept the new reality represented by the Risen Jesus. It is time for them to take up their responsibilities in the front line of the new world, but they are not yet ready to undertake their responsibilities. I wonder about us? Are we ready?

We need to confront the account of the Resurrection to understand how it impacts each of us. One of the ways to do so is to admit that it is outrageous. Only by admitting

that can we come to understand how powerful it is. You see, our world is full of stories we daren't touch. The 16th president was "Honest Abe" Lincoln. Washington could not tell a lie. Jesus was raised from the dead. One of these things is not like the others because the resurrection is the only one of these stories which has the power to transform people. It cannot do so, however, until a believer confronts it for the outrageous, impossible, unbelievable thing that it is, and then accepts that no matter how outrageous, impossible and unbelievable it is, it happened. Only by doing that can you come to know the power of God. Only by knowing the power of God can you be about the task He has laid upon you. If you allow the story of the resurrection to just lay around in your mind as one of the things you believe in, like the story of Washington throwing a dollar across the Potomac, it cannot transform you, and unless you are transformed, you cannot carry the Gospel forward. You are part of something larger than yourself, and you will need God's power to accomplish it.

Growing up in America means that most of us spent our childhood in churches which taught us the story of Jesus' death and resurrection without ever asking us to confront what an outlandish account that it is. We have been taught to enshrine Jesus in symbol and evade him in reality. Accepting Jesus on such terms won't work. Unless you confront this outlandish tale, just as those on the road to Emmaus were challenged to do, you will not be transformed and unless you are transformed, you will not be able to be about the work to which you are called. You cannot take your place in the transformation of the world until you, yourself, are transformed. A faith of symbols and not reality is useless. You can proclaim your belief that Jesus was raised from the dead until you are numb in the head, but you will no more be transformed by that confession than will the person on the bus next to you who believes in The Lollypop Fairy. Unless and until you honestly and fearlessly confront the question, "So what?", you are prowling in the

dark corners and Jesus will slip through your fingers like fog, just as happened on the road to Emmaus.

So what, then?

I'm reading a very difficult book right now by David Foster Wallace. He worked on it for years but did not finish it before he took his own life. He was writing about America with all its flaws and pimples and he said:

Americans are in a way crazy. We infantilize ourselves. We don't think of ourselves as citizens—parts of something larger to which we have profound responsibilities. We think of ourselves as citizens when it comes to our rights and privileges, but not our responsibilities. ...¹

The same could be said of great numbers of the world's Christians. We too often don't think of ourselves as parts of something larger to which we have profound responsibilities. We think of ourselves as entitled to heaven when we die if we will but affirm our faith from the words of the Apostles' Creed once a week. That's why I was particularly drawn to a teaching of Rabbi Adam Kligfeld reported in this week's Accidental Talmudist. The teaching is on Psalm 37:25, a part of a blessing called the Birkat HaMazon recited by Jews at the END of a meal. It goes:

I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken, nor their children begging for bread.

Hold on a minute! We have all seen the righteous forsaken and their children go hungry. What are we to think? Do the Scriptures lie? "No", Rabbi Kligfeld said. "The Psalms were not written to describe the world we live in, but rather the world we WANT to live in, i.e. the world God entrusted us to help Him create. When we see a righteous person in need, the Rabbi teaches us, we cannot walk on by. It is a part of the awesome responsibility we take on when we seek to act for God. I would add that given our appallingly inaccurate perceptions of who is and who is not righteous, we should in-

¹ The Pale King by David Foster Wallace

clude suffering people of all natures in this observation. What would that look like?

I got a call from Carolyn at CaRES this week. She had a client who needed \$11.90 to buy insulin. INSULIN! How in the name of all that is holy can someone in the richest country ever known not be able to buy insulin? Of course, our first impulse is to make value judgments about how he or she spent their money so as to run out of insulin. Are those the right questions to be asked in light of Rabbi Kligfeld's explanation of Psalm 37? Is that the sort of world we would want to live in? You don't know what pressures caused him to be too broke to buy insulin, but you do know the consequences of doing without insulin. What would you do? What would the risen Christ tell you to do as someone who is part of something larger toward which you have profound responsibilities?

I don't know and can't know what responsibilities God has laid upon you to further the world prayed for in the Birkat HaMazon. That is between you and God. I do not personally believe that God creates humans without purpose but I do personally believe that those called for so many years to meet here each week are those who are called to respond to that purpose, even if it is poorly understood. Until you apply yourself to the biggest question there is, "So what?" that purpose will remain poorly understood. If you will have the courage to engage that question, the answer will be provided.

See 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. Beloved, 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. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.²

AMEN

Claustrophobia. “Rules and Regulations” Twilight Zone? Outer Limits?

Yom HaShoah was Thursday.

Corporations are getting better and better at seducing us into thinking the way they think—of profits as the telos and responsibility as something to be enshrined in symbol and evaded in reality.

2 1 John 3:1-3

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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