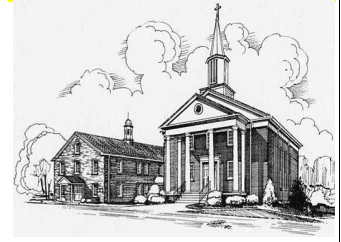


The Lessons Appointed for Use on the Third Sunday of Easter

Year A
RCL



Acts 2:14a,36-41
Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17
Luke 24:13-35

The Collect

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.

Amen

Acts 2:14a,36-41

Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd, “Let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” So those who welcomed his message were baptized,

and that day about three thousand persons were added.

Dilexi, quoniam

- 1 I love the LORD, because he has heard the voice of my
supplication, *
because he has inclined his ear to me whenever I
called upon him.
- 2 The cords of death entangled me;
the grip of the grave took hold of me; *
I came to grief and sorrow.
- 3 Then I called upon the Name of the LORD: *
“O LORD, I pray you, save my life.”
- 10 How shall I repay the LORD *
for all the good things he has done for me?
- 11 I will lift up the cup of salvation *
and call upon the Name of the LORD.
- 12 I will fulfill my vows to the LORD *
in the presence of all his people.
- 13 Precious in the sight of the LORD *
is the death of his servants.
- 14 O LORD, I am your servant; *
I am your servant and the child of your handmaid;
you have freed me from my bonds.
- 15 I will offer you the sacrifice of thanksgiving *

and call upon the Name of the LORD.

16 I will fulfill my vows to the LORD *

in the presence of all his people,

17 In the courts of the LORD'S house, *

in the midst of you, O Jerusalem.

Hallelujah!

Now on that same day two of Jesus' disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death

and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

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. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

SERMON

Last Sunday I spoke of our tendency to strip the most astonishing event in human history of its wonder, moving it into ordinary space where it can be viewed without the emotion and astonishment experienced by the original witnesses. The Easter event flummoxed everyone who came into contact with it in the 1st Century, but our culture associates it with happy children and bunnies and, really, anything but the unspeakable horror of a crucifixion followed by the impossibility of a resurrection. In the account of the road to Emmaus, we get a glimpse of just how upsetting the Easter event was to those who lived through it.

NOW on that same day two of Jesus' disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself

came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?”

The translation to English robs us of much of the drama of this exchange for in Greek, Jesus’ question was literally, “What are these words you have been pitching back and forth to each other?” We have been pitching words back and forth to each other about Jesus for 2,000 years now. Jesus, his nature and his message, have generated more tossed words than any subject I can conceive. Unfortunately, the more we toss words about Jesus around, the more abstract they become. Abraham Joshua Heschel spoke of the degrading of our sense of wonder imposed by our advanced civilization:

As civilization advances, the sense of wonder almost necessarily declines. Such decline is an alarming symptom of our state of mind. Mankind will not perish for want of infor-

mation; but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder.¹

The two disciples on their way to Emmaus did not suffer from a lack of wonder. They were astonished and tossing words back and forth, trying to find some satisfactory understanding with which to approach this thing which had, undeniably, happened and which had thrown all Jerusalem into a maelstrom of thrown words.

Cleopas became impatient with this stranger who seemed to know nothing of this world-upsetting event.

Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?”

“What is wrong with you? Are you the only stranger in town who doesn’t know what’s gone on in

¹ Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion (Abraham Joshua Heschel)

Jerusalem? What kind of sleepwalker are you? The whole town can speak of nothing else!” This thing which had happened had the tongues of the town flaming like tongues of fire! It was all-consuming and the possibility that this stranger had gone through Jerusalem without knowing anything about it was unthinkable!

When Jesus asked them about the words they were throwing, and the things which had happened, Luke tells us they looked sad.

He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

The point where the rubber meets the road is the nature of Jesus. His disciples saw him as a prophet mighty

in deed and word before God. That was a mental image with which they were familiar. They knew about prophets. Torah is full of stories about prophets. They did not know the phrase, “Son of God”, which would have sounded disrespectful at best and sacrilegious at worst. In 1st Century Israel, that kind of talk could get you stoned. What term could they apply to Jesus other than prophet? They knew what prophets do, as well. “But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” they said, and thus neatly summed up Jesus as one of many dead prophets of Israel, one who came to set them free of Roman occupation. As with all those other prophets, now this Jesus was dead and, with him, their hopes for the redemption of Israel. They were allowing the past to dictate the paths the future might take. No wonder they looked sad! Their understanding left no room for a new future.

Jesus, a little impatient, corrected them:

Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

Here, at last, we find the hinge of history, the point in time when that which will be replaces that which was; the new path in which that which was will no longer determine what is to be. The road to Emmaus is the place where we see, clearly, that this is our Father’s world. In Luke’s Book of Acts, we read:

Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd, “Let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apos-

bles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.”

And of what were the people to repent? Their misdeeds, certainly, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but also a new thing. They were to repent of that which was, that which defined their world up to this point, and embrace by baptism the new world order initiated by the Risen Christ.

We sit today in practically empty churches, singing familiar songs, hearing familiar verses. Here, of all places, that which was still defines and limits what is to be. We see enormous churches on television with preachers offering that which itching ears long to hear. In just the way that Cleopas and the other disciple’s

eyes were kept from recognizing the Risen Christ, the eyes of our culture are distracted by mega churches and show places filled with messages so agreeable that we can no longer see the nails or the empty tomb. Our eyes are kept from seeing those called to Christ as they feed the hungry, as they provide living space for the homeless.

It has been reported that the Salvation Army is introducing a new program, Pathway of Hope, that will support semi-permanent housing for families for up to two years. I want to challenge us to partner with them. CARES has similar programs and I know that several of you volunteer with them. I salute you! Faith, or belief, can only operate in the present. It takes no faith to believe what has been – that's settled. Likewise, it takes no faith to believe what God can do, for with God all things are possible. Faith functions in what you believe

God is going to do right now.² The hinge of history is the place where the page is turned, revealing that which can be. Join with God in the here-and-now. The past is immutable and does not need your belief. The future is in the hands of God. Now is the time you have in which to act. Do so!

AMEN

² Dr. Henry Blackaby

BENEDICTION

It is not enough to believe in God. We are to believe God. God's people desperately need to experience God mightily at work in their lives. A seeking, searching world must also see God working.³

Come to know Him.

Believe Him (as He has revealed Himself to us).

Seek Him.

Expect Him to respond.

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

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³ Ibid.