

*The Lessons Appointed for Use on the*

## **Second Sunday of Easter**

**Year B**

**RCL**

Acts 4:32-35

Psalm 133

John 20:19-31

### **The Collect**

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### Acts 4:32-35

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

**Psalm 133 Page 787, BCP**

*Ecce, quam bonum!*

- 1 Oh, how good and pleasant it is,  
    when brethren live together in unity!
- 2 It is like fine oil upon the head  
    that runs down upon the beard,
- 3 Upon the beard of Aaron,  
    and runs down upon the collar of his robe.
- 4 It is like the dew of Hermon  
    that falls upon the hills of Zion.
- 5 For there the LORD has ordained the blessing:  
    life for evermore.

**1 John 1:1-2:2**

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us – we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with

him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

**John 20:19-31**

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

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 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.”

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.” 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.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 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.”

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these

are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.



## SERMON

My friend, Charlie, sent me a link to a discussion of Bach's "St. John Passion", a magnificent piece of music which is not much performed today. Bach couldn't have foreseen the Third Reich, so he couldn't have imagined how hurtful the words of the Gospel of John sung in German would sound to our ears. Every time the chorus sings of "die Juden", the Jews, images of the Holocaust appear in the minds of contemporary people. The closest thing Bach wrote to an opera is, in part, unlistenable to contemporary audiences. That's a shame. It's not Bach's fault, of course, for that is just how the Gospel of St. John begins in today's text.

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them

and said, “Peace be with you.”

These words, and others in this Gospel, have been put to terrible use historically to justify horrible things done to the Jews. It is high time we put this to rest for when the writer of John speaks of “the Jews” he is not speaking of an outgroup which was opposing the new church, for John and his community WERE Jews for the most part. He is speaking of the cast in stone, self-righteous attitudes of the community at large. If John's Gospel were written about events happening today, he would be referring to us – the standard bearers of “the way things are supposed to be”.

Yes...you have it right. This Sunday I'm going to stop preaching and start meddling again. Bear with me.

Most church members with whom I come into contact are most comfortable describing themselves as “conser-

vative” in outlook, by which I understand that they place greatest value on those concepts which they understand to have been handed down through history and which have stood the test of time. It is that very conservative mindset that John is writing about when he speaks of “the Jews”. He is writing of those who loved their understanding and ways of worship so much that when confronted by the new covenant offered by Jesus they reacted with violence. “No way that’s right!” they screamed. They didn’t do so because “the Jews” are hard-hearted or evil. They did so for the same reason contemporary people confront any idea of change in our culture with such vehemence. We don’t want nothing changed no how, no way.

The first question presented is whether or not the things we understand to have been passed down from

ancient history really were. If I told you that Jesus almost certainly wasn't born in December, or that the date of Pentecost was chosen to coincide with the Jewish holiday of Shavuot, you'd probably become uncomfortable. If I reminded you of the historical fact that “in God we trust” wasn't added to the Pledge of Allegiance until 1954, or that it didn't appear on our paper money until 1957, you'd probably get even more uncomfortable, even though each of you likely remembers when this was done! If I wanted to make you REALLY uncomfortable, I'd tell you that the Pledge itself was written by an avowed Socialist who lived until 1931, and I'll bet you didn't know that!<sup>1</sup>

We have a whole stable full of things that offer us a sense of stability and immutable permanence, many of

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<sup>1</sup> The Pledge of Allegiance was written in August 1892 by the socialist minister Francis Bellamy (1855-1931). It was originally published in *The Youth's Companion* on September 8, 1892. Bellamy had hoped that the pledge would be used by citizens in any country. [USHistory.org](http://USHistory.org)

which I am sad to say, are more fiction than fact, and we defend these things fiercely for to change them frightens us. The Jewish culture of Palestine in the time of Jesus was no different. After the Resurrection but long before our faith came to be called Christian, those who followed Jesus were called Followers of The Way. The Followers of The Way were busily pushing the buttons of the general culture, and it reacted in just the way our conservative brethren react to assaults on contemporary sacred institutions. We're an idolatrous lot, we are. However often God tells us that this is His world and that He refuses to be cast in stone, we like nothing better than to set the sacred in stone. Having done so, we then defend the idol we have made with all the force of our own self-righteousness. René Magritte painted the famous painting, “The Treachery of Images” when

he was 30 years old. It is a painting of a tobacco pipe with the legend in French, “This is not a pipe.” It truly is not a pipe. It is the image of a pipe. We are, historically, more comfortable with representations of God than with God before us, so it’s no surprise that when God appeared in Palestine, we were so uncomfortable with the idea that we crucified Him!

Scripturally, when given a choice between what we have always understood and what is actually written, we'll even prefer our own understanding. We read today:

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a

needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Forty years ago and more, I was a policeman. It was a time of protests against a war that history has taught us was ill-advised at best. It was the time of Flower Children, Peace and Love, and communes. Young people, people my age, were living communally and my elders were screaming about “Godless Communism” and the death of the Free Enterprise system. I remember pointing out our passage from Acts to one of the older policemen with whom I served (Yes...I was a meddler and a trouble-maker even then). He refused to even think about it, saying with much force “That's not what that means”. Of course, that is exactly what that means. The

people of The Way were living in communes and rejected private ownership of property just as the monks at the Archabbey of St. Meinrad, where I go each summer, do to this day. Just pairing “Christian” with “Communist” makes our skin crawl to this day, but that is exactly what is reported, minus Karl Marx's additions.

What's wrong with private ownership of property? Isn't that the foundation of capitalism to which we pay such great homage? The young church apparently saw much wrong with it or the writer of Acts wouldn't have passed it on to us for our consideration. Ought we not confront this assertion if we are to describe ourselves as Bible-believing Christians? See? I told you I was going to meddle.

Private ownership of property leads us inevitably to understandings of entitlement. If this is mine, it is not



yours. This is called “dualistic thinking” and is the same drive that causes Sarge to mark parts of our carpet as “his”. Connection with God, however, makes dualistic thinking impossible. Viewing the world as the body of Christ means seeing God’s children as just that.

When have you ever told one of your children that they cannot have food because the money is yours, not theirs?

In his letters, Paul uses the image of different parts of a body to illustrate this absolutely critical part of the new covenant.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but

of many. If the foot were to say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body’, that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear were to say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body’, that would not make it any less a part of the body.... If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.<sup>2</sup>

Would you think to deprive your left elbow of nourishment because your eyeballs felt they had a superior claim? We view our selves as unitary things, but view our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ as separate members. It is precisely this understanding, this dualistic thinking, which fueled the anger of the larger community toward Jesus, and which stands, even today, in the way of our following The Way.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 (excerpted)

You were called into a world gone mad with entitlements to bring the light of Christ into it. You were not called into the world to “get yours” and you were not called into the world to further divide it. You were called into the world to live out these words from 1 John.

... that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.<sup>3</sup>

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3 1 John 1:5-10

You didn't appear here by chance. You appeared here in response to a call. You were called to bring the Light of the World INTO the world. You were called to be part of the body of Christ.

AMEN

## BENEDICTION

Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz ?  
My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends.  
Worked hard all my lifetime, no help from my friends,  
So Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz ?

I think we picture our relationship with God in this way, and so did Janice Joplin. It's not about getting what I want. It's about serving those who suffer and need.

Our friends in the Roman church speak of to post-Reformation emphasis on individual salvation. That's a mouthful. Janis Joplin said it better. We often view our faith as a way to draft God into the pursuit of our goals. If I want a Mercedes Benz, I'm going to have to pray for it hard. It won't do. If the only reason you are a Christian is so that you get to go to heaven when you

die, you missed the point. The point is that you have been Baptized into the body of Christ. You are to look out, not with the dualistic view of the world, but with the eyes of Christ, upon a suffering world, and to offer yourself, as did Christ, as an example of the solution.

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

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