

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Third Sunday of Easter

April 18, 2021

Psalm 4:1–8 (ESV):

1 Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!

You have given me relief when I was in distress.

Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!

2 O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame?

How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Selah

3 But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him.

4 Be angry, and do not sin;

ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah

5 Offer right sacrifices,

and put your trust in the LORD.

6 There are many who say, “Who will show us some good?

Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!”

7 You have put more joy in my heart

than they have when their grain and wine abound.

8 In peace I will both lie down and sleep;

for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

First Reading: Acts 3:11–21 (ESV):

Peter Speaks in Solomon’s Portico

11 While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon’s. 12 And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? 13 The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac,

and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. 14 But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. 16 And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

17 “And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. 19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

EPISTLE: 1 John 3:1–7 (ESV):

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. 4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.

THE GOSPEL - Luke 24:36–49 (ESV):

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

36 As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, **“Peace to you!”** **37** But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. **38** And he said to them, **“Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?”** **39** See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit

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 And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, 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 before them.

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 and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

Sermon 16 – Third Sunday of Easter

“Refreshed Self”

Acts 3:11-21

Dear friends,

What does faith do? I have always found it strange the effects that simple belief can have. It can change lives, it can change a person's perspective, it can change personality. It can do these things for good or bad. Someone who you knew for a long time, when their beliefs change, sometimes everything about them changes. We expect this sort of thing for Christian faith, that's what we've been raised to expect, and but many of the changes of faith are invisible. But does that mean that it is nothing? Far from it. Peter both demonstrates and talks about this in the short sermon he preaches in the book of Acts today.

This opens very awkwardly, with a guy clinging to Peter, which is odd until you read the stuff beforehand. These verses take place after Peter healed a lame beggar in a very public way, right at the entrance to the temple. So that's why this guy is clinging to Peter, because He's either not quite trusting his healed leg, or he's so incredibly ecstatic at his

miraculous healing that he can't stop hugging the guy that did it. This single healing is going to yield quite the Domino effect. It will eventually reach the ears of the authorities, who will bring the disciples and eventually the healed beggar himself in for questioning. This becomes a big problem, and I believe the disciples even end up getting beaten up for it. A simple, miraculous act of compassion, and the reaction is so severe. Regardless, this guy is healed, and a crowd begins to gather, and they're staring at Peter and John. Peter knows a good cue when he sees one, so he starts preaching.

“12 And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?” I love how blasé Peter starts, but I also love the angle he takes, which is to smack down this idea that the disciples are special straight off the bat. None of that. Peter tells them it is not them that is powerful, it is not them that makes this happen. Don't stare at me, listen to me. This is such a phenomenally wonderful explanation of miracles in general. The miracles aren't the point. We think that miracles were somehow convincing unto themselves. The reason for this is we trust so much more what we see than what we hear, a by-product of a sinful world if ever there was one. Why are we so skeptical about what we hear? I think I can speak for both of us here. We take a lot of what we hear with a grain of salt because there are just so many lies out there, and many of them are so compelling, so convincing. A person who believes everything they hear is bound to be taken for a ride, often the worst kind of ride you can imagine. Skepticism is the healthy way to handle the lies of the world. And the world lies, just like its father the devil does. That old snake has made his native tongue of falsehood our own native tongue. Our sin is all over this. Little lies to prop ourselves up, make others feel better, a little spice to add to a story to make it funny. It doesn't have to be big conspiracies or propaganda pieces. We indulge in it so carelessly.

But that's the world, that's people. We take that same logic that we use to protect ourselves in a sinful world and we apply it to God, distrusting what we hear, and thinking

it would be so much more valuable to see. Miracles don't accomplish a darn thing by themselves, and Peter offhandedly says just about as much. Stop staring. This isn't what it's about. Listen instead. If the Word of God speaks, that is what gives the miracles their power. Again, this is not how we think. The miracle of healing would be so convincing, it would be so life-changing to see. Peter tells these people exactly what the rest of the Scriptures do: Without the Word of God, without the speaking, miracles mean nothing. They're just special effects.

Okay, so what does Peter say? **“13 The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. 14 But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.”** This first sermon is beautifully basic and refreshingly blunt. Why are you gawking at the healed guy? You denied Jesus and asked a murderer to be delivered from execution instead. Peter's turn of phrase here is lovely. You killed the Author of life, but God raised Him from the dead. That is the entirety of the human condition and experience, and the entirety of mankind's relationship with God, in one sentence.

It is so easy to deceive ourselves, because we live in a world of lies, that we are above all this. That we would've known better. We would've recognized Jesus, we would've gotten it. Maybe. Maybe you wouldn't have. The folks who rejected Jesus are going into the temple for their worship. These are people who by every metric they have to measure it consider themselves good, faithful Jews. These are the good people you see every Sunday, and they murdered the author of life while asking for a murderer to be spared his sentence. Peter's challenge to these people is to their physical actions. Peter's challenge to you is to your spiritual condition. You are not physically responsible for Jesus' false trial or murder. That doesn't matter. It doesn't matter to God. You are the reason Jesus needed to suffer and die. It is that simple. Man has been doing this to God since the

Garden of Eden. It will continue to do so until Jesus returns. Nothing can stop sin except this very sin, this very murder, this very act of atonement. Jesus takes that sin into His own being and then dies from it, and God responds with life, raising Him from the dead, from sin to holiness, from death to life. He doesn't treat us with wrath, He treats us with life, because He poured out that wrath upon His Son's shoulders.

“To this we are witnesses. 16 And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.” So what does faith do? Faith does this. But pastor, my faith doesn't heal me. My faith doesn't do things like this! Doesn't it? Faith heals, Peter says, it heals the body and it heals the soul from the sin that sickens it. We want the healing to be in the flesh, and for this guy it was. We want the healing to be what we can see. Peter talks about something far more compelling, the healing of what we hear. The healing of what we are. Faith in Jesus' name brings back the dead, it brings life out of death, because faith delivers that crucified Jesus into the heart of the person, and from that heart comes life. What do our eyes tell us? They tell us that this is the lie, that Jesus' promises of life and healing are a lie, because we still get sick, we still die, we still die from getting sick even in these latter days. Our eyes see age, they see our sicknesses, our infirmities, they see what we don't have, and they tell us that Peter is lying.

He isn't. Peter is speaking to a truer reality than this crude approximation we all live in right now. He is speaking to the real world, the real truth that waits out there but that is also oddly alive in us right now. What do I mean by all this? Your body suffers illness and age. Your soul suffers depression, pain, despondency, hopelessness. That is what we feel and experience in this age, but that is what we will be freed from in the age to come. That is what your ears are telling you is yours right now. But I don't see it, God! How is it useful to me if I don't see it! Why should I care if it is not here right now?

Our body, our life today, it isn't unimportant, but it isn't everything either. That's another lie of the world, that somehow the pain and the pleasure of the here and now is

all there is. It's not true. We have a whole other life waiting for us, and we desperately need to cultivate that life. To tune to that frequency. That is why we hear. That is why we do not trust our eyes. We do not trust the seductive power of what we feel and what we see. Instead, we trust God's Word, we trust what He tells us. Peter says as much.

17 “And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. 19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.” Times of refreshing. What a lovely way to describe what's to come. What a picture of God's gifts. God has appointed this for you. Repent therefore. Repent of what you think is real, what you think is important, and turn to what God wants you to focus on, what God wants you to act on. Jesus was sent just for you, and He was sent to bring you that refreshment. The refreshment of forsaking the need to make all this the real deal, to make all this matter, to bring sense to it, or to have control of it. It's life. It's up and down. It's a sinful, broken, irregular mess. It will never satisfy, it will never last. What will last is that refreshing that He gives you anew every time you turn to Him. That refreshing is the refreshing of your whole self. The redoing of you, your life, your failures, your sins, and all the messes you bring to the table. He straightens it all out in the heavenly ledger sheet. To sinners this has no value. I urge you to value nothing else more than this. God loves me. God saves me. God makes me live again. I won't die in vain. None of this is in vain, He's making it all go just the way it should. He's making it good again. God promises always to make you good again, until He makes you good for eternity.

Amen.