

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Second Sunday of Easter

April 11, 2021

Psalm 148:1–14 (ESV):

Praise the Name of the Lord

148 Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from the heavens;

praise him in the heights!

2 Praise him, all his angels;

praise him, all his hosts!

3 Praise him, sun and moon,

praise him, all you shining stars!

4 Praise him, you highest heavens,

and you waters above the heavens!

5 Let them praise the name of the LORD!

For he commanded and they were created.

6 And he established them forever and ever;

he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away.

7 Praise the LORD from the earth,

you great sea creatures and all deeps,

8 fire and hail, snow and mist,

stormy wind fulfilling his word!

9 Mountains and all hills,

fruit trees and all cedars!

10 Beasts and all livestock,

creeping things and flying birds!

11 Kings of the earth and all peoples,

princes and all rulers of the earth!

12 Young men and maidens together,
old men and children!

13 Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his majesty is above earth and heaven.

14 He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his saints,
for the people of Israel who are near to him.
Praise the LORD!

First Reading: Acts 4:32–35 (ESV):

They Had Everything in Common

32 Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

EPISTLE: 1 John 1:1–2:2 (ESV):

The Word of Life

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

Walking in the Light

5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the

light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

2 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. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

THE GOSPEL - John 20:19–31 (ESV):

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

Jesus and Thomas

24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” 26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” 28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

The Purpose of This Book

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; **31** but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Sermon 15 - Second Sunday of Easter

“Puzzle Peace”

John 20:19-31

Dear friends,

Our Gospel lesson for today stars Thomas, but I did him last year, so we're going to look at the other things going on here. What Jesus says, what He does, and what John himself says by way of summary at the end. The resurrection is a big deal, and we know why it is a big deal, but what are the effects of that resurrection? We all know we're going to heaven when we die. We all know that our bodies will not stay in the grave but rise again when Jesus returns. These things aren't to be despised, but let's see if there's something else to this. If there isn't, I'll circle back and we'll close this on a banal note. As I said, John makes notes at the end about the purpose of the book, and Jesus talks about peace in the forgiveness of sins. Both of these things travel down through time to us.

Usually this where I talk about what has happened so you understand the full story, but what has happened is the resurrection. I remind you that the resurrection of Jesus is a time of great uncertainty for the disciples. John watched Jesus die by inches. The others patently did not, having been too scared and fleeing. This whole era starts with a sense of tremendous hopelessness, it is all over. The Jesus thing is done, He's dead, just like all the other crazy hedge prophets that have risen in Israel's history, and there was a lot of them. These were your typical nutcase cult-leaders, super charismatic to a certain kind of damaged individual, and every time they followed the same pattern. They'd sound good for a while, make sense, get a bunch of followers, but then the gloves come off, these men become more and more unhinged, they do something scandalous and unacceptable,

and usually they get arrested or murdered. The disciples are seeing this pattern with Jesus and their whole world has been thrown into doubt. They're still together, I guess, but I don't know how long that would've lasted without Jesus intervening with these appearances. Going along with the loss of hope and purpose, there is a fair amount of unbelief. They think Jesus is dead, ignoring the many, many clear warnings He gave about this whole event. They don't get it.

God comes to us in moments like these sometimes. He comes to us when we lose it, when we're about to lose Him, because of what happens or any other reasons. He doesn't do it every time, but this story is familiar to me in the way God has dealt with me throughout my life. It's gracious of Him when He doesn't let us lose it all, doesn't let us lose it completely, it reminds us that God is not ignorant or uncaring about how these things effect us.

Now, the disciples have heard the initial reports from Mary and the other women, maybe they heard Peter say that there wasn't a body in the tomb. Here's what John says happens: **“19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”** What God says happens, and this is a proclamation, not a greeting. The disciples are full of fear, corroded by unbelief, poisoned by their own failure, and here Jesus comes with the antidote. Peace be with you. I did it. It's done. He gives them this peace by His presence, and He gives them this peace by His words, and they are in desperate need of both, as are we.

The disciples need to know Jesus is alive, because they put all their hopes in Him. They put three years of their lives into Him. They thought it was building towards something, and then the crucifixion took it all away from them. Have you ever felt that way? Like something was going to happen, God was going to do something big or significant, like you had a mission in life, then something happened to put a knife in those hopes? That's what they were dealing with. They needed to see Jesus, see Him alive, see

the victory for themselves. Men cannot triumph over death, but God can, and they needed to see that Jesus was God and that Jesus did it for them. This isn't simple morale boosting, a confidence builder, this was ratification of the faith that they kept in Him. We can question the disciples confidence all we want, certainly we can question their sense, they look awfully stupid and don't ever really seem to all the way get it. We cannot question their faith, though. It wavers, it breaks, it does all sorts of other really ugly things, but here they are, spiralling downward toward true death, the death of the soul, when Jesus rescues them.

This is what Jesus delights in. This is what Jesus does to people. It is rarely this dramatic, more in the mundane frustrations of life than anything else for most of us. The heartbreaks, the evils, that kind of thing. Regardless, this is what Jesus does to us. You and I have faith but that faith is fragile, it can be broken. Jesus restores and strengthens our faith when He visits us, when He speaks words of peace to us, when He offers His body and blood to us. Recognizing that is hard because we want something different, something that feels different, but that doesn't change what Jesus gives. The disciples see Jesus and they know it was all real after all, not just some kind of sustained three year hallucination.

His words do the same. Simple words. Peace to you. These words carry the weight of their message. Normally when we tell someone something without actually doing anything about it its just that, just words. Hey person, feel better. Hey person, don't worry. It's actually kind of annoying depending on what day you're having. Jesus is proclaiming, though, not offering empty reassurance. God's Word never returns to Him empty, and Jesus *is* God's Word, walking and talking, and He tells them it is over. It is done. He did it.

This is an echo of what Jesus says on the cross. He proclaims His victory there with that timeless declaration: It is finished. What is? Death is finished. No longer does death grip our lives in its cold hands. No longer do we have to fear that this is all there is, there

is far more and far better for God's people. Sin is finished. We are sinners, you and I, we know we screw up far more than we do anything right, and that also is finished. Jesus has scored the deathblow, and all we are doing now is waiting for that sinner to bleed its last. We still sin, but that has no hold on us, no meaning to us. Sin isn't who we are anymore. We're not just an ugly collection of mistakes, now we're God's sons, and that means our sin isn't the sum of our being. It is just leftovers, the trash you haven't gotten around to in the fridge anymore, and when we die God will throw it in the bin for good, so that who we really are, who He has really made us, can shine. Jesus reminds the disciples of all of that here. Peace be with you. I'm bringing it. I won it on the cross, and here it is, all for you, the peace of knowing you don't have to die in vain, knowing you don't have to live in vain, knowing none of it is beyond God and He has planned for all of it.

Lest you think these words are just for the disciples, look at what He says next. **“20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”**

This is the church. Jesus has just tightly and productively defined what the church is, and you are in the church, so this is you. This trickles down from disciple to disciple, from church to church, all the way down to you. Receive the Holy Spirit, your sins are forgiven by the church in Jesus' name, which means it is all done, which means everything I was just banging on about is all delivered to you. The church is Jesus' instrument of forgiveness, Jesus' hands of mercy, Jesus delivering to you the very promise of “it is finished.”

It isn't finished, I know. We're still here. This is still life and it still hurts like hell itself sometimes. None of that changes Jesus promise. The race has been won, you're just getting to the finish line. Furthermore, you're doing it with God's own grace powering

your legs to run, and your hands to work mercy as you run. This is you. Finished. Completed. At peace. This is who you are right now. Tuning out the noise of the world and the assaults of the devil makes that you hard to hear, but that's why we're all here, to gather and remind ourselves that this sinful life and this sinful self isn't the real deal. It's all just a phase, one of the bad days.

The church is the funnel, channeling God's grace toward your ears and your mouth. It is the delivery system for your God, the meeting place where you can bring your broken old wrecked self to Him and tell Him you can't do anymore. It is the place where God hears you, sees you, understands you, and gives you what He offers: The peace which passes understanding. The peace of knowing that death is broken, that pain is temporary, that our reward is eternal just like our God is eternal. It is the peace of knowing that no matter what happens, nothing can change what Jesus is or what He has made you to be. You can disgrace it, you can smear sin all over it, and maybe some days you will. You can take anything from a sinner, even life, but forgiveness, and the peace that forgiveness gives, cannot be taken.

The disciples thought all was lost. They thought it was all over. Jesus is there to tell them the opposite, they have just begun their good work. They have just begun to see the amazing depths of what God had in mind, not just for them, but for the whole species. You are further down that line. I don't know if its as dramatic as it was for the disciples, probably not, we're just trying to get through the week most days. It doesn't matter. Jesus says the same thing. Fear not. Don't worry. Peace be with you. My peace is already with you because I am with you, I have changed you, I have redeemed you, and even death cannot separate you from me.

Amen.