

Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary
Readings, Commentary, and Discussion Questions for April 1, 2018
Easter Sunday



THE READINGS

First Reading: Acts 10:34-43 *Alternate Isaiah 25:6-9*

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ – he is Lord of all. ³⁷ That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹ We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Worth Noting: Peter is summarizing here, in a highly compressed version, the Gospel of Luke for the centurion Cornelius and his household. Have you ever given a two-minute summary of your beliefs? How did that go? Have you thought about how best to do that?

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

¹ O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!

² Let Israel say,
“His steadfast love endures forever.”

¹⁴ The LORD is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.

¹⁵ There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous:
“The right hand of the LORD does valiantly;

¹⁶ the right hand of the LORD is exalted;
the right hand of the LORD does valiantly.”

¹⁷ I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the LORD.

¹⁸ The LORD has punished me severely,
but he did not give me over to death.

¹⁹ Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the LORD.

²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD;
the righteous shall enter through it.

²¹ I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.

²² The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.

²³ This is the LORD's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴ This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 *Alternate Acts 10:34-43*

¹ Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ² through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you – unless you have come to believe in vain. ³ For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴ and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them-- though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

Worth Noting: Paul tells us many people witnessed the risen Christ. What have we gained because Jesus Christ did not remain to minister and guide us today?

Gospel: John 20:1-18 *Alternate Mark 16:1-8*

¹ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to

Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹²and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?”

She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”

¹⁴When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?”

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”

¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary!”

She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher).

¹⁷Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Worth Noting: Hearing this Gospel every year reminds us that Mary Magdalene was the first evangelist, announcing to the other disciples the good news of the Resurrection. Who first proclaimed the Good News to you? How do you proclaim the Gospel?

CONNECTING WITH THE SCRIPTURES

Entering into the Scriptures

Careful readers have long recognized that the Gospel of John is a composite text, edited and expanded over decades. It includes disparate (perhaps even conflicting) traditions about the life of Jesus. The Easter morning Gospel, John 20:1-18, includes two such traditions: that of women at the Empty Tomb and of Peter’s encounter with Christ.

Mark, the first Gospel (c. 70 C.E.), relates that Mary Magdalene and other women first witnessed the Empty Tomb. In the likely earliest version of Mark, the women did not encounter the risen Jesus. Paul, in the selection from 1 Corinthians above (c. 55 C.E.), relates that Cephas/Peter was the first witness to the risen Christ. For Paul and many in the early Church, witness to the risen Christ established authority within the Church: the earlier

someone saw Jesus the greater the authority. Thus, affirmation of Peter's first encounter went along with Peter's preeminent position in the early Church.

The Gospel of John combines the two traditions but gives precedence to Mary Magdalene over Peter or the Beloved Disciple. She first witnesses the Empty Tomb (John 20:1) though Peter and the Beloved Disciple are the first to enter the tomb and the Beloved Disciple is the first to believe (verses 6-8). John goes on to say that not only was Mary the first witness of the Empty Tomb, not only did she proclaim the Good News to the other disciples, she was also the first witness to the risen Lord (verses 14-18).

Contemporary scholars see in the various accounts of the Empty Tomb and the first witness a contest for authority in the early Church. Did the women first meet Jesus as Matthew (Matthew 28:9) and John claim, or did Peter, as Paul claims (1 Corinthians 15:5)? The community that produced the Gospel of John allowed both of the various traditions to lie side by side, as if to say "Neither is wrong and both are right."

The Lord is Risen! The Lord is Risen Indeed!

All the Empty Tomb accounts in the four Gospels agree: Faithful women, determined to bury Jesus properly, first arrived to find the tomb empty. Like the male apostles, the women did not comprehend Jesus' foretelling his Resurrection and so went expecting to care for his body in the tomb. They differed from their male counterparts, however, in that they let neither sorrow and despair at Jesus' death nor fear of further violence keep them from venturing out to anoint Jesus' body and to fulfill faithfully the commandment to honor the bodies of the dead.

Perhaps not all the women who followed Jesus went to the tomb. Some stayed to offer emotional and physical solace to the little company. These women went out. Like Martha (Luke 10:40 and following), they saw a need for something to be done and went to take care of it. In their action, they encountered the mystery of Jesus: his life, his death, and his Resurrection. There they earned the title First Apostles.

Questions for Discussion

How does authority work in your religious community? Is it based on seniority? Education? Gender? A combination of all? If there are clergy, how do they work with and relate to lay leaders?

How does your community react to differences? Are you willing to put different ideas and understandings alongside each other? If so, then what?

Experiencing the risen Christ empowered and authorized the first Christians. Where and when do you have experiences of the risen Christ? At church? In service? In study? In music?



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