

Easter 2



April 7, 2002

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, with joy we celebrate the festival of our Lord's resurrection. Graciously help us to show the power of the resurrection in all that we say and do; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them.... {22} "You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know-- {23} this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. {24} But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. {25} For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; {26} therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. {27} For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. {28} You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.' {29} "Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. {30} Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. {31} Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.' {32} This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses."

Portions of Peter's Pentecost sermon are used for the first lesson on Easter 2 and 3.

14. standing with the eleven: "with" here does not mean "standing with the group known as 'the eleven'," but "standing with the other eleven apostles." "The eleven" here includes Matthias (Acts 1:26).

23. according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God: The Passion was not a contingent event. It was planned by God. Jesus acknowledged this in the Gospels Jesus' cup is already determined (Matthew 20:23), and he prayed that he might escape it (Matthew 26:39). Luke refers to God's purpose for the Pharisees in Luke 7:30, and here he unfolds God's plan for Jesus.

killed by the hands of those outside the law: It was the Romans, those outside the law, who were directly responsible for Jesus' death (the ultimate dishonor). Still, the Judeans were responsible too. Both Judeans and Romans were involved. There is plenty of guilt to go around. The guilt of the past must lead us to self-examination rather than accusation. "In this verse Luke refers to 'the eternal paradox of the Cross; the Cross is at one and the same time the action of the purpose and plan of God, and an unspeakably terrible crime at the hands of wicked men.'" [1]

24. it was impossible for him to be held in its power: According to the thinking behind the Gospel of John, the whole creation (including death) came into being through Jesus, the Logos. When Jesus died, the creation dissolved, decayed and returned to the incoherence of its uncreated state. Death, too, lost its cohesion and could not hold its creator. This view is reflected also in Matthew's description of what happened when Jesus died (Matthew 27:50-52).

25-28: Psalm 16:8-11 (LXX). Peter repeats the quotation of Psalm 16:10 as evidence that David knew of the resurrection (verse 31). David's honor is not as great as that of Jesus. Jesus' honor was established by God. David knew that the Messiah would be raised from the dead because he was a prophet. David died but Jesus has been raised and his honor is secured.

30. Since he was a prophet: David is not called a prophet in the Old Testament. However there are

extra-biblical sources which do attribute prophetic powers to David: 11QPs^a 27:2-11, speaking of the psalms and songs he composed, "all these he spoke through prophecy that was given to him before the Most High;" Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 6.8.2 paragraph 166, "...the Deity abandoned Saul and passed to David, who, when the divine spirit had moved over to him began to prophesy."

God had sworn an oath to him that he would put one of his descendents on his throne: Psalm 132.11.

31: Peter says that David spoke as a prophet when he said, "He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption." In 1 Peter 3:19f. Peter writes that Christ "made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah," so he was in Hades, but was not abandoned there.

32. *of that we are all witnesses:* All the apostles are witnesses to the fact that Christ is risen, fulfilling his command that they be his witnesses "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Psalm 16

Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. {2} I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you." {3} As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight. {4} Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips. {5} The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. {6} The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage. {7} I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. {8} I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. {9} Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. {10} For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit. {11} You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

3. *the holy ones in the land:* "The Levitical priests are the 'saints on earth,' because Yahweh is in their midst (Num. 16:3). We have to translate 'the saints on earth,' for we have to think of the terrestrial counterpart of the heavenly beings who surround and serve Yahweh." [2]

4. *their drink offerings of blood:* In Israel blood was the carrier of life, and life belonged to Yahweh, so human beings were forbidden to drink blood (Genesis 9:4). There were no drink offerings of blood in the sacrificial worship of Israel. These are the offerings of a foreign cultus that the Levitical priest-psalmist has turned away from the Temple.

take their names upon my lips: The psalmist will not even say the names of the other gods.

5. *my chosen portion...my lot...boundary lines...heritage:* These words are used in the distribution of land. "In Israel the land was assigned to the tribes in a sacral act of distribution by lot.... Only Levi was exempt from this process of land distribution." [3] Levi had no land, instead Yahweh was her portion, lot, and heritage (Deuteronomy 10:9; Joshua 13:14; Numbers 18:20).

9. *my heart is glad...my soul rejoices...my body also rests secure:* This reflects the three components of the Israelite understanding of human nature, body, soul, heart, and simply means the whole person. The same psychology is present in the admonition to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

10. *Sheol...the Pit:* The underworld, the grave. Israel's horror of death and its associations was absolute. One became "unclean," that is, ritually disabled, by any association with death, even having one's shadow fall on a place where a body was buried even though no one knew it was there. A priest was more limited in his relationship to the dead than other Israelites. For example, he was not to defile himself for his relatives or even his wife (Leviticus 21:1-4). The priest-psalmist is particularly thankful that Yahweh has preserved him/her from ritual uncleanness.

11. *the path of life...your presence...your right hand:* "The closing verse speaks of the bliss of the nearness to God, which in the midst of death opens up a way of life, on which one may walk with joy." [4]

1 Peter 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, {4} and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, {5} who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. {6} In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, {7} so that the genuineness of your faith being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. {8} Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, {9} for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

In Greek, 1:3-12 is a single sentence with three major divisions: 3-5, 6-9, 1-12. "This section...functions as the *prooemium* [an introduction which prepares the hearers to listen attentively to the rest of the argument] for the discussion to follow... showing how the triune God has established the church as a community of hope by reason of the resurrection of Jesus.... the major themes of the ensuing discussions of the present and future fate of the new people of God are announced in these opening verses." [5]

3-5: God has created new life for his people through the resurrection of Jesus. They are born through the resurrection of Jesus into a living hope and into pure and eternal inheritance in heaven.

3. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*: For the same introductory formula see 2 Corinthians 1:3; Ephesians 1:3.

6-7: "The thrust of the two verses is...that present trials may be greeted with joy since they are necessary if faith is to have the kind of proved character that God finds acceptable at the final judgment." [6]

8: The faith that overcomes the trials of the present enables God's people to rejoice in the midst of their sufferings because they love and believe in Jesus even though they have not seen him.

9. *for you are receiving*: "The sense is that Christians now obtain by faith what they will only fully enter into at the end; the power of the new age is already at work and allows Christians in their present plight nevertheless to experience something of the eschatological joy awaiting them." [7]

John 20:19-31

{19} 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." {20} After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. {21} Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." {22} 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 retain the sins of any, they are retained." {24} But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, 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 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." {26} 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." {27} 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." {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 come to believe." {30} Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. {31} 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.

19. *the first day of the week*: "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark" Mary Magdalene had gone to the tomb." Genesis 1:3-5: God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was

morning, the first day. With the resurrection comes also a new creation. With the death of the logos the old creation is in the process of dissolution. The new creation has already begun. Both are inexorably in process of reaching their respective goals.

21-23: Jesus greets his disciples with Peace, blesses them with the Spirit, and empowers them to forgive sins (on behalf of God who will endorse their decisions).

24-25: Thomas was not present and will not believe (in the resurrection? the appearance? the commissioning?).

25. *Unless I... put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side*: In verse 27 Jesus invites Thomas to do this, but instead he confesses, "My Lord and my God!"

26-29: *A week later*: The first day of another week, Thomas was present. He sees and believes.

27. *"Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe"*: Something has clearly changed since the previous Sunday when Jesus told Mary Magdalene, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father." The ascending was, for John, essential for the completion of the passion, and a condition for the coming of the Spirit (John 7:39; 16:7). "In v. 22 the Spirit is given and in v. 27...Thomas, so far from being forbidden, is invited to touch the hands and side of Jesus. A possible conclusion from these facts is that John believed that between vv. 17 and 22 the ascension, or at least the complete glorification, of Jesus had taken place." [8]

29. *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe*: It is these about whom Peter writes in the second lesson.

30-31. *written in this book*: Jesus' signs have been written in a book, so that readers may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and have life in his name. Unlike the scrolls of the Old Testament, the Gospel of John was written in a book. Some have seen in this contrast another indication of the newness of what God created in Jesus.

Reflection

The suffering Jesus experienced is repeated by the sufferings of those who follow him. Though they have not seen him, and though their sufferings are very real, nevertheless they believe in him. They have the assurance that they are a part of a new creation. Death has died, the old order is in process of dissolution, the resurrection marks the beginning of a new creation. The proper response to God's action is faith like that of the Psalmist who declares his/her faith in God and rejoices in God's protection and everlasting pleasures. (S)he has chosen God as his/her portion and (s)he will not be moved. (S)he will receive the outcome of his/her faith, the salvation of his/her soul.

The author of the Gospel of John is wrestling with a real problem for the early church, and for us. "How could one believe in the risen Lord without the benefit of a resurrection appearance?" The answer was "...faith comes through hearing the Word of God, through hearing the risen One speak through his apostolic messengers." [9] Thomas could not, would not believe without seeing the risen Lord, but in the event he didn't need to touch Jesus' wounds in order to find faith. We, too, have questions and doubts. We need to confront them and remember what Jesus said in response to the rich man's request that he send Lazarus back to warn his brothers. "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets (that is "the Bible" as it was then) neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). We don't believe in Jesus because he was raised from the dead. We believe he was raised from the dead because we believe in Jesus. The Gospel was written so we might believe and have life in his name. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Hymns [10]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

133 --E--Jesus Lives! The
139 --D--O Sons and
264 --P--When All Your
514 --II--O Savior, Precious
739v --II--In All Our Grief

724v --G--Shalom
641v --G--Peace Came to Earth
774v --G--Dona Nobis Pacem
675v --G--We Walk by (806s)
154, 246, 792s/741v, 779s,
743s, 144

Prayers of the People [11]

P or A: Gathered together let us place our needs and wants, our hopes and fears, and those of all people before our God, saying "Refresh our faith," and responding, "Take away all doubt."

A: For all believers gathered today who believe even though they have not seen. We remember especially the national bishop, Telmor, and our synodical bishop, _____, that they may shepherd us faithfully and with courage. Refresh our faith. Take away all doubt.

A: That all who serve communities and nations, especially the Government and Parliament of Canada, may not be deterred from seeking the good of all people and that the Creator's goal of peace for all may be recognized and advanced by human leaders and every citizen. Refresh our faith. Take away all doubt.

A: That those who have no faith, or whose faith has been damaged by a betrayal of trust in the church, may receive a bearer of the peace and presence of Christ. Equip us with courage and sensitivity for such tasks. Refresh our faith. Take away all doubt.

A: That the sick and all in need of our concern and prayers, especially we remember _____, be granted clear vision of your wounds, now glorified, received for our healing and salvation. Refresh our faith. Take away all doubt.

A: We give thanks for all witnesses to Christ's resurrection. Like Mary Magdalene, Peter and Thomas, may their continuing witness refresh our faith. Take away all doubt.

P: God of life, you have sent your son into our homes and lives that we may believe. Grant us and all the world life in his name. Amen.

Or [12]

Presider or deacon

Through resurrection from the dead, God has given us new birth. Let us offer prayers to God for the living hope of all the world.

Deacon or other leader

For peace from on high and for our salvation. For the peace of the whole world, for the welfare of the holy churches of God, and for the unity of all. For this holy gathering and for those who enter with faith, reverence, and fear of God. For our new brothers and sisters illumined by the light of Christ. For N our bishop and the presbyters, the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God. For the world and its leaders, our nation and its people. For all those in need, the suffering and the oppressed, travelers and prisoners, the dying and the dead. For ourselves, our families, and those we love. Remembering our most glorious and blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. To you, O Lord.

Presider

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, who gives us eternal peace through Jesus Christ. Hear our prayers which we offer in the hope of glory, and breathe upon us with your Holy Spirit. Glory to you for ever and ever.

Notes

- [1] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1998, p. 256.
- [2] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, p. 236.
- [3] *Ibid.*, p. 238.
- [4] *Ibid.*, p. 241.
- [5] Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996, p. 91.
- [6] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- [7] *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- [8] C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*. London: S.P.C.K., 1962, p. 470.
- [9] Reginald H. Fuller, *Preaching the New Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1974, p. 178.
- [10] <http://www.worship.ca/text/rcla0102.txt>
- [11] http://www.worship.ca/text/inter_a2.txt
- [12] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>