

Bible Study

Easter Day (B)

April 4, 2021

RCL: Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Mark 16:1-8

Acts 10:34-43

“The Episcopal Church Welcomes You!” The message is posted on street corners in thousands of cities across the Americas. Created in the 1950s, the slogan and sign were adopted not only to attract membership but also to express the church’s deep value of hospitality. We in The Episcopal Church believe that everyone has a place in our communities and are eager to invite them in to sit with us at the Lord’s table.

We see a similar message in our reading from Acts on this Easter Sunday, in which Peter is surprised to find that God has poured out the Holy Spirit even on the Gentile centurion, Cornelius, and his family. “God shows no partiality,” Peter exclaims. Notice, however, that in this passage, Peter is not the one who welcomes Cornelius’ family. Cornelius’ family are the hosts who welcome Peter. In fact, it is Peter who, at first, is resistant to entering the Gentile home. Yet upon entering, he finds the Holy Spirit has already entered ahead of him.

Practicing hospitality is a beautiful expression of Christian love deeply rooted in the tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures; just as Jesus came out of the tomb, the risen Christ calls his people out of their homes and worship places to encounter the hospitality that is given to them by others in places they’d least expect. Jesus calls us out of our communities to join the Holy Spirit at work in “every nation.” Perhaps our signs should say, “The Episcopal Church is coming to you!”

- Who experiences transformation in this passage? Peter or Cornelius and his family?
- When have you experienced unexpected hospitality?

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

“On this day the Lord has acted.” The psalm for today is jubilant with praise and celebration, declaring that God has acted victoriously on behalf of the rejected, the oppressed, the underdog, the ones who are facing death at every corner. The God of this psalm is alive and active. The God of this psalm is one whose “mercy endures for ever.”

It is a God that many of us may find difficulty seeing in this painful year of death and despair. How can God be alive and well when my neighbors are not? And yet the vision of the God of life is often most clearly seen in the valley of death. The God of life presented in Scripture is the God who knows death intimately and has come through it. God is not ignorant when it comes to death, and God is not ignorant

of our current struggle. God finds us in the struggle and brings us to life. So today, like the Israelites, we celebrate the God of life who meets us at the brink of death.

- What does it mean to rejoice and be glad in the God of life when we are surrounded by death?

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

My son and I like to walk in the woods near our house and collect acorns. Sometimes I hold the acorns in my hand and think about the tree from which they came. I think about how the forest is made up of hundreds of trees that came from hundreds of acorns from hundreds of other trees. The forest might seem like an unchanging, static presence, but it is dynamic—always growing and passing on life to life.

In today's passage from 1 Corinthians, the author paints a similar picture of the Church, which springs forth from Christ's resurrection. Experience of that life-giving resurrection was received by St. Paul from Cephas, the twelve, five hundred others, James, and other apostles (sadly, Paul skips mentioning all the women). It was then handed down by St. Paul to the Corinthians themselves. And some time down along the line, knowledge and experience of Christ's resurrection has come to us, today.

For this reason, Easter is not simply a celebration of an historical memory, but like the forest through which my son and I walk, it is a celebration of an ongoing mystery that continually takes place in the life of the dynamic, ever-growing, and ever-changing Church. It's noteworthy that in this passage, St. Paul does not say to the Church, "You were saved," but rather, "You are *being* saved." Thus, on this Easter Day, we not only remember a resurrection that took place 2,000 years ago but we also experience our own participation in the ongoing resurrection of Christ.

- What implications might the notion of "you are being saved" instead of "you were saved" have on Christian living?
- How does seeing Easter as an ongoing saving event differ from seeing it as a one-time historical moment?

John 20:1-18

"Doing nothing often leads to the very best kind of something." So says Winnie the Pooh in the 2018 Disney film, *Christopher Robin*. The film features a grown-up Christopher Robin, who has become so consumed with his "important" work at his company job that he scarcely has time for his wife and daughter and has all but forgotten about his childhood friends in the Hundred Acre Wood. However, with a helpful reminder from his childhood friend, Pooh, Christopher Robin learns to slow down again and notice what is really important in life.

It's a familiar story, particularly in our hyper-productive, consumeristic world. Will we be too busy with our to-do lists to notice the miracle of Easter this year, or will we stop to do nothing in order to find the "very best kind of something?"

That is exactly what we see Mary Magdalene doing in the gospel reading for today when she experiences a life-changing encounter with the risen Jesus. As soon as Peter and the other disciple had seen the empty tomb, they were off again, presumably to find some sort of “fix” to the problem of a robbed grave. Not Mary Magdalene. Rather than running away to find something to do about the problem, she took the time to stop and notice. To notice her own trauma and loss – and to weep. To do nothing but to feel. And it was there in her quiet weeping that she was given the great privilege of being the first person to see the risen Jesus face-to-face. While Peter and the other disciple had gone off to do important things, Mary stayed to do nothing, which led “to the very best kind of something.” We are often called to spring into the action of an important to-do list, but if we never slow down to notice the world within and the world around us, we might completely miss the transformative miracle of the Resurrection.

- With whom in this passage do you most identify?
- How might you find some time to do nothing this Easter season?

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