

Easter 3 Year B 2024

Acts 3:12-19, 1 John 3:1-7, Luke 24:36-48

Sin is a key word in all three of our readings this morning. And it's not surprising. We are in the season of resurrection and there would be no resurrection of Jesus if he hadn't first died. And he would not have died if it were not for sinners. Sin was the reason Jesus was born among us, went to the cross for us and died.

Of course, it is unfashionable to talk about sin or sinners these days. Received wisdom is that we will put people off believing in Jesus if we do so. Rather, we should talk about God's great love and omit any reference to sin, or even perhaps the cross. Is that right?

This is not Jesus's way, nor John's. John writes about the *great love the Father has lavished upon us*. But then he goes on to write about sin. Nor is it Peter's way.

I want to take a look at Peter's approach but first let's dip into our gospel reading.

Our gospel reading is Luke's account of the same post-resurrection appearance of Jesus in the upper room as the first appearance in our gospel reading from John last Sunday. John chooses to go on to relate a second encounter a week later, when Thomas is present. Luke instead gives us a fuller account of this first appearance.

Luke tells us that the disciples were startled and frightened as Jesus suddenly stands among them. Even his words "peace be with you" – a normal every day greeting at the time – do nothing to dispel the notion that they are seeing a ghost.

And, because the disciples still do not believe that Jesus is alive even after he has shown them his crucifixion wounds, Luke gives an extra bit of the "tell and show" that Peter was talking about last week. Jesus demonstrates his bodily resurrection by eating some fish in front of them. No one has ever reported seeing a ghost eat!

It seems that the disciples are reassured because Jesus is then able to provide some teaching to put it all into context. Referring to the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms, and opening their minds to understand the Scriptures, just as he has done earlier on the road to Emmaus, *he told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day."*

Hold onto this. Hold onto it when you come to read your bible. Delve deep into the Scriptures – all of them. Because, while there are those who think that the New Testament has superseded the Old, or even that the God of the New Testament is different – or maybe a more accurate representation of God - Jesus didn't think so. Jesus gives us a fuller picture of God but for him our Old Testament books were the Scriptures that spoke to him of himself. And they still do speak to us of Jesus, if we will look. Read them, even if it's difficult.

Jesus went on to say *repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in the name of the Messiah to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.* And I think we should include in our reading the next verse in Jesus's speech, verse 49, which is curiously omitted from the passage chosen for the lectionary reading:

I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Preaching and power go together for witness. We accept the need for words but ignore the need for power. Perhaps this why verse 49 is left out of the gospel passage for today. But we need it, power. God's power, Holy Spirit power. Healings or other works of power will add the dimension of "show and tell" to our witness.

This is happening in our first reading from Acts. The passage assumes that we know the crucial first ten verses of Acts 3, the healing by Peter and John of the man at the Gate Beautiful. Of course, by this time the Holy Spirit has come upon them in power.

So did Jesus's words in the upper room sink in?

Have they grasped what Jesus was saying about the Scriptures speaking of his death and resurrection, about preaching repentance for forgiveness of sins, beginning in Jerusalem? We shall see.

Peter has healed the man, likely an instinctive action out of compassion. It is unlikely that he is doing it to attract attention to himself. But this is just what happens. People gather in Solomon's Colonnade to gawp at him and John, these Galilean miracle workers.

So Peter addresses them and I think that there are four things that we can notice here which could resonate with our own witness:

1. He refuses to take personal credit for the miraculous healing, instead pointing to Jesus.
2. He takes opportunity to preach the resurrection of Jesus and to relate it, in terms relevant to his hearers, to the Scriptures, speaking of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and of Jesus as the Holy and Righteous One, a phrase his hearers would relate to God.

He points out the power of the name of Jesus, the Author of Life, and that faith in him in brought regeneration, renewal, to the man unable to walk since birth.

And putting it into a context that they would understand Peter teaches, as Jesus did in the upper room that first Easter day, that this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer.

3. He does not mince words about Jesus's crucifixion, even though some would take offence at it. He accuses his hearers of being responsible for Jesus's death and highlights a contrast between the release of a murderer and the killing of the Author of Life.
4. Finally, Peter urges a response to what they have seen and heard, namely repentance and a turn to God *so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

Is it only because this passage in Acts speaks of the resurrection of Jesus that it is coupled today in the lectionary with his appearance in the upper room?

Or is it perhaps because the Acts passage illustrates how profoundly Peter was affected by the Risen Jesus on that occasion?

Because we see how utterly convinced Peter is of the fact of Jesus's resurrection, so much so that he has no hesitation in believing that Jesus would heal through him.

Now, we haven't had the privilege – or the terror – of meeting Jesus in the upper room. So perhaps it is right to ask ourselves whether we are as utterly convinced that Jesus is alive, present and powerful as Peter is. Or do we have doubts that we need to work through, rather than ignore?

And secondly, we see how important it is to Peter to speak of repentance for the forgiveness of sins – in a manner appropriate to the occasion – in an echo of Jesus's words in the upper room: *repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in the name of the Messiah.*

Are we willing to go that far and speak, appropriately, about sin? Indeed, have we, like Peter, earned the right? And if not, as Paul wrote, "*How will they hear?*" (Romans 10:14)

And finally, thinking of ourselves, are we feeling jaded, despondent, worn out, in need of refreshment? Would we like to be regenerated, renewed, by the Author of Life?

Peter would say to us *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

We have an opportunity to do just that in the Eucharist that will follow. Amen

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