

Second Sunday of Easter – Year A

Today's readings continue to focus on the resurrection of Christ and its implications for believers. These readings show how convinced the early disciples were that Jesus was alive, that his crucifixion was not the end of his reality. The intensity of this faith propelled them forward to spread the good news of Christ and the Christian message.

Acts 2:42-47 This extract is the conclusion of Peter's address to the crowd of 'pious Jews', as Luke calls them, that had gathered in Jerusalem on the feast of Pentecost outside the room where the followers of Jesus were meeting. In his second chapter of the *Acts of the Apostles* Luke describes the effect the Holy Spirit had on the disciples and he wraps up Peter's speech to the crowd with this testimony.

Luke writes of the conversion of many Jewish people to what Peter was saying about the life-changing message of Jesus and the power of the Spirit to help people turn to God with a renewed focus on the teachings of Jesus. These newly baptized Jewish people did not change their religion, just as the disciples of Jesus did not change their religion. What they did, in fact, was commit themselves more intensely to God by following the pathway mapped out by Jesus.

They wrote their gospels to show that Jesus was the fulfilment of Jewish prophecy

In this context it is worth keeping mind that the four evangelists were not advocating a new religion. Rather, they wrote their gospels to show that Jesus was the fulfilment of Jewish prophecy and was the Messiah promised from of old by the holy men and women of the Jewish faith.

Luke goes on to describe the community spirit of the Jesus followers – how they looked after each other, with the wealthier ones providing for the poorer members. The temple in Jerusalem was their place of common prayer and the Eucharistic meal was celebrated in their homes. Luke then makes a final point that those who came into contact with the Jesus people were impressed by the quality of their lives and asked to join their number. They then went through the initiation ritual of baptism.

The simple question we could ask ourselves at this point is, 'How well does my lifestyle reflect my commitment to Christ and his values?'

Psalm 118 This psalm was most likely composed in the years after the Babylonian exile, after 539 B.C. It consists of a collection of invocations, independent fragments, laments and hymns. It was probably sung in procession with the people singing out the responses of, 'For his love has no end', in Hebrew, *ki le'olam khasdo* – literally, 'for unto forever is his love.'

His faith enables him to rise above gloom and self-pity as he pushes forward with hope

The poet bears witness to the fact that God's love and compassion have brought him through some tough times. He does not ignore the reality of the distress he has endured but his faith enables him to rise above gloom and self-pity as he pushes forward with hope, optimism and faith in God's enduring love.

1 Peter 1:3-9 This letter was written to the Christians living in Asia Minor, present day Türkiye, with the intention of giving encouragement and support to their enduring faith in Christ. This, in light of the ridicule and persecution many of them were suffering.

This extract certainly reads like a Jewish blessing and an expression of support and encouragement. The resurrection of Jesus is affirmed and his role as Israel's Messiah is identified, i.e., Jesus is the *mashiach*, (Greek: *christos*) the anointed one. The inheritance mentioned in v.4 is a Jewish term, which, in the Jewish Scriptures refers to the land that the people of Israel are meant to have. In later Jewish writings 'inheritance' denotes life beyond this earth. And that is the concept of heaven here in v.4.

Christians in different parts of the Roman Empire were being treated as enemies of Rome not because of their faith in Christ – after all, Rome tolerated a multiplicity of religions – but because they refused to worship the emperor. The writer encourages his fellow Christians to endure the hardship of their lot and maintain their commitment to Jesus Christ, all in the hope that they will be vindicated at the end when Christ returns in glory. They are being assured that God will reward their faith and commitment.

The text here reads like a Jewish reference to suffering before the final deliverance, described in Hebrew as the *khevlo shel mashiach*, the birth pains of the Messiah. The implication is that suffering is not a punishment from God, but rather it is part of a refining or purifying process of faith. There is a reward at the end of the line for those who maintain their faith and trust in God.

John 20:19-31 This episode with Thomas is unique to John, but it has the same intention as the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to the disciples in Luke 24. Both texts affirm the bodily resurrection of Jesus – Luke’s Jesus asks for something to eat, John’s Jesus challenges Thomas to feel his wounds – but they also insist that Jesus’ body is not the same as it was. He can appear and disappear at will, he can pass through the locked doors. His body does not have the same physical substance as before.

The doors are locked because the disciples are in fear of the Jews – but they are Jews. So what is the issue here? John’s gospel consistently refers to the Jewish authorities that were opposed to Jesus as ‘the Jews’. This does not mean all the Jews. Only those who took exception to Jesus, his mission and the effect he was having with a considerable number of his Jewish compatriots.

What is striking here is that Jesus makes no reference to Peter’s cowardice in denying him or the flight of the rest of them for fear of apprehension and torture. They abandoned him in disgraceful fashion and yet he has no recriminations. In fact, he begins with the standard Jewish blessing of peace and commissions them to spread the good word.

This is a true to life recognition of Jesus' identity

Thomas in this scene is the evangelist’s mouthpiece for those who cannot deal with the reality of a human being rising from the dead. Thomas seems to be hard-headed but when he is challenged by Jesus he folds and expresses his faith. This is a true to life recognition of Jesus' identity and it takes us back to the beginning of this gospel where ‘the Word became human and lived among us.’

Everything about today’s readings adds up to, ‘OK. So what now?’ Matthew, Luke and John in particular end on a note of, ‘Go out and tell the world of the message of the risen Lord and the lifestyle he recommends for fulfilment and ultimate salvation.’ Paul wrote the equivalent of, ‘If Christ is not risen then we are wasting our time believing in him.’

This is a call to a transformed way of living, not just drifting through life, but paying attention to the values of justice, the role of suffering in life, and compassion. Our growth to wholeness is the goal, and this is achieved through solid relationships along the way – our relationship with God, a compassionate approach to our fellow travellers, the crucial healthy relationship with self, and our relationship and interaction with our environment.



Two persons who love each other are in a place more holy than the interior of a church.

William L. Phelps. American author and literary critic.



Bill’s wife was pregnant. The couple were meeting with their doctor to go over preparations for the birth.

The doctor asked Bill, ‘Have you ever been present during childbirth before?’

Bill said, ‘Yes, one other time.’

The doctor asked, ‘And what was that experience like?’

Bill said, ‘The room was very dark and then suddenly very bright, but I don’t remember much before that.’

Laurie Woods