

## Annotated Readings for Easter Day

March 31, 2024

### Acts 10:34-43

Peter began to speak to Cornelius and the other Gentiles: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ--he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: 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. 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; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, 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. 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. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

**Context.** From the time that God called Abraham, Jews believed themselves to be God's chosen people and assumed that every Messianic prophecy applied exclusively to them. It was, I guess, easy to ignore Isaiah 49:6, where God says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob [Southern Kingdom] and to restore the survivors of Israel [Northern Kingdom]; I will give you as **a light to the nations**, that my salvation may **reach to the ends of the earth**." Peter continued to believe that eternal salvation belonged only to the Jews until he had a dream in which God invited/commanded him to eat all kinds of restricted foods (pork, shellfish, etc.) and said that what God had proclaimed clean Peter was not to profane (disrespect). So Peter addresses the Gentiles with today's text. Notice that the passage begins and ends the idea of universality; "anyone" in the beginning and "everyone" at the end.

### Questions for Consideration/Discussion

1. Confession time: Have you ever thought that some people (individuals or groups) are beyond salvation? Hitler, various terrorists are obvious examples, but when I was a kid, the Roman Catholic Church taught that Protestants were all going to hell because they didn't have confession and absolution, and therefore died in a state of sin. Too bad for them.
2. Related question: What, in your thinking and faith, is required for salvation?
3. Weird question: Can you think of a single prophet who ever said that "everyone who believes in him [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins through his name?"

## Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

### *Confitemini Domino*

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; \*  
his mercy endures for ever.
- 2 Let Israel now proclaim, \*  
"His mercy endures for ever."
- 14 The LORD is my strength and my song, \*  
and he has become my salvation.
- 15 There is a sound of exultation and victory \*  
in the tents of the righteous:
- 16 "The right hand of the LORD has triumphed! \*  
the right hand of the LORD is exalted!  
the right hand of the LORD has triumphed!"
- 17 I shall not die, but live, \*  
and declare the works of the LORD.
- 18 The LORD has punished me sorely, \*  
but he did not hand me over to death.
- 19 Open for me the gates of righteousness; \*  
I will enter them;  
I will offer thanks to the LORD.
- 20 "This is the gate of the LORD; \*  
he who is righteous may enter."
- 21 I will give thanks to you, for you answered me \*  
and have become my salvation.
- 22 The same stone which the builders rejected \*  
has become the chief cornerstone.
- 23 This is the LORD's doing, \*  
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
- 24 On this day the LORD has acted; \*  
we will rejoice and be glad in it.

**Context.** This is obviously a Psalm of Praise, so it has no "hidden messages" or themes that we might have to find. Nevertheless, verses 22 and 24 seem to refer to specific events.

### **Questions for Consideration/Discussion**

1. Do you have any idea which events verses 22 and 24 might be referencing?
2. Do you see any verses that seem to apply to the Resurrection, even though the very idea of "resurrection" would have been both unknown and unthinkable to the Psalmist?
3. If so, what does that tell you about how we might interpret and apply Psalms to our own lives today?

## 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

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, 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.

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, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 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. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

**Context.** All of Chapter 15 is dedicated to arguing on behalf of the physical Resurrection of Jesus and describing its implications for the Corinthians. Paul's warning in the first paragraph suggests that the Corinthians are under the influence either of Judaizers, who do not believe in resurrection, or of the so-called "super-apostles" who added requirements to salvation (usually "good works" and almost always money, lots of money, which the Corinthians were only too happy to pay).

Very important is the first line of the second paragraph, where Paul says he handed on that which he had received, by which he means divine revelation, not the teaching of Peter, James, and John. Here he is invoking divine authority (not human authority) for this teaching. Less important is Paul's catalogue of post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus; they are not recorded in the four canonical Gospels, but keep in mind that tons of Gospels were floating around at the time; we saved only four of them for our use (and John's Gospel barely made it).

Finally, Paul argues for his own "apostolicity," (his claim to be a "real Apostle"), as he was under constant attack from the Judaizers and super-apostles for being a fraud. We see his self-defense throughout his letters.

### Questions for Consideration/Discussion

1. I was going to explain why I thought the Corinthians were happy to pay the super-apostles for their teaching, but I'm much more interested in why *you* think they (and the Galatians, by the way) were so susceptible to a "members-only Gospel." Why would they be willing to pay others for what Paul was always careful to offer for free? Do we have to pay for it?
2. In receiving any spiritual teaching, do you ever have trouble determining who speaks with divine authority and who is relying on human authority? How can you tell who has what?
3. Are you able to muster much sympathy for Paul, who felt continually obliged to defend his own identity as a "real Apostle?"

## **John 20:1-18**

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

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and 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. They 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.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus 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.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus 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.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

**Context.** I’m afraid that I don’t have the skill to contextualize this story in a single paragraph. May it suffice to say simply that John reiterates some of his favorite themes in this story; people making erroneous assumptions, people not recognizing the Son of God when they are standing right in front of him, Peter and (presumably) John accepting the reality of the empty tomb and just going home... the list goes on and on. The discussion is more important than the context.

### **Questions for Consideration/Discussion**

1. What did Peter see inside the tomb? What did Mary see inside the tomb? How might you account for who saw what?
2. At what point in the story did Mary look inside the tomb? What was she doing before that, and what do you suppose took her so long? What does that say to us?
3. Mary held on to her belief that someone had moved (or stolen) the Body until Jesus called her by name. Are you as entrenched in your own deeply held beliefs? What does it take for God to come in and cause you to re-think them?