

Sunday, April 4, 2021  
Easter Sunday  
Reflections by Juel Pierce

**First Reading**

**Acts 10:34-43**

*Peter crosses the immense religious and social boundary that separates Jews from The resurrection of Jesus is announced, and the response is one of terror and amazement.*

<sup>34</sup>Peter began to speak to [the people]: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup>but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. <sup>36</sup>You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup>That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: <sup>38</sup>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. <sup>39</sup>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; <sup>40</sup>but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, <sup>41</sup>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. <sup>42</sup>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. <sup>43</sup>All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

**Reflection**

*This text is from Peter’s sermon when he responded to God’s call to baptize Cornelius and his household. Previously, who had Peter thought the Gospel was for? (see Acts 10:9-23) Who is Cornelius?*

*(see Acts 10:22) What has Peter learned from his encounter with Cornelius about who the Gospel is for? (verses 34-36) Where did Jesus' ministry begin? (verse 37-38) What does Peter proclaim about Jesus? (verses 39-41) What was Peter's command from God? (verse 42) What was the message he was commanded to proclaim? (verse 43) Why is this text significant for us today? Are there people you think should not belong in our church? What would Peter have to say about that?*

### **Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24**

*This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Ps. 118:24)*

<sup>1</sup>Give thanks to the LORD, for the | LORD is good;  
God's mercy en- | dures forever.

<sup>2</sup>**Let Israel | now declare,**  
**"God's mercy en- | dures forever."**

<sup>14</sup>The LORD is my strength | and my song,  
and has become | my salvation.

<sup>15</sup>**Shouts of rejoicing and salvation echo in the tents | of the righteous:**

**"The right hand of the | LORD acts valiantly!**

<sup>16</sup>The right hand of the LORD | is exalted!  
The right hand of the | LORD acts valiantly!"

<sup>17</sup>**I shall not | die, but live,**  
**and declare the works | of the LORD.**

<sup>18</sup>The LORD indeed pun- | ished me sorely,  
but did not hand me o- | ver to death.

<sup>19</sup>**Open for me the | gates of righteousness;**  
**I will enter them and give thanks | to the LORD.**

<sup>20</sup>"This is the gate | of the LORD;  
here the righ- | teous may enter."

<sup>21</sup>**I give thanks to you, for you have | answered me**  
**and you have become | my salvation.**

- <sup>22</sup>The stone that the build- | ers rejected  
has become the chief | cornerstone.
- <sup>23</sup>**By the LORD has | this been done;  
it is marvelous | in our eyes.**
- <sup>24</sup>This is the day that the | LORD has made;  
let us rejoice and be | glad in it.

## **Reflection**

*Why does the psalmist exhort us to give thanks to God? (verse 1) Who does the psalmist say should declare this? (verse 2) Who is God to the psalmist? (verse 14) Why is that true? (verse 15) In some ways, this psalm seems particularly appropriate this year. What does the psalmist proclaim of the Lord? (verses 16-17) Do you feel that God has punished us? (verse 18) The psalmist apparently felt that way. For what is the psalmist thankful? Why would the psalmist want to enter the gates of righteousness? (verse 19) As we gather for the first time in many months in our church (and for some of us, for over a year), why does this seem a particularly appropriate psalm? (verses 20-21) Even if we could not be in our building, what is our faith founded on? (verses 22-23) Today is Easter! We are celebrating the resurrection, probably in a way we've never celebrated it before. What does it mean to you that "This is the day that the Lord has made"? What are you celebrating this Easter?*

## **Second Reading**

**1 Corinthians 15: 1-11**

*The core of the Christian faith and Paul's preaching is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As the crucified and risen Christ appeared to the earliest of his followers, so we experience the presence of the Risen One in the preaching of this faith.*

<sup>1</sup>Now 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, <sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>3</sup>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, <sup>4</sup>and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup>Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. <sup>7</sup>Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup>Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. <sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

<sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

## **Reflection**

*What does Paul want to remind the Christians in Corinth about? (verses 1-2) Why does he want them to remember? Is it important to him? to them? to us? Paul says he “handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received.” Is Paul making this story up? What is he “handing on” to them (and to us)? (verse 4) Who were the witnesses to this? (verses 5-7) Was Paul a witness? (verse 8) In what way was Paul a witness to the resurrection of Jesus? (See Acts 9:1-19) Why does he describe himself as “unfit to be called an apostle”? And yet, he says, that “I am what I am.” (verse 10) Paul started out as a Pharisee, as one who was determined to persecute and put down believers in Jesus.*

*In what way is he the same as he was before? (He didn't become timid and quiet, did he?) What does the grace of God have to do with who Paul is? Who gave Paul the courage and persistence to proclaim the Gospel? (verse 11) One of the things about this text that gives me hope is that, if God can use Paul as he is, perhaps God can use me as I am, as well!*

## **Gospel**

## **Mark 16:1-8**

*The resurrection of Jesus is announced, and the response is one of terror and amazement.*

<sup>1</sup>When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint [Jesus' body]. <sup>2</sup>And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup>They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" <sup>4</sup>When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. <sup>5</sup>As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup>But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. <sup>7</sup>But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." <sup>8</sup>So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

## **Reflection**

*This is such an interesting version of the Easter Gospel. Who came to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body? (verses 1-2) What was the problem they thought they would encounter? (verse 3) How was that particular problem solved for them? (verse 4) What alarmed them? (verse 5) What did the young man say to them? (verse 6) What command did they receive at the tomb? (verse 7) Did they follow this command? (verse 8) What did they do? Why did they act the way they did? Fortunately for us, this is not the end of the story. (It is the end of Mark, though!) Who do you think Mark thought would tell others?*