



BIBLICAL RESOURCES

Act 4:32-35; Psalm 118 [117]; 1 John 5:1-6; John 20:19-31

Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you

John 20:19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But these



are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Today we hear one of the most widely remembered stories from the New Testament: the story of doubting Thomas. It is interesting that that title has stuck, even though the point of the story is that Thomas actually arrives at faith!

Whereas the Empty Tomb Proclamation Narratives resemble each other in all four Gospels, the Resurrection Appearance Narratives are particular to each Gospel. The Fourth Gospel is always a bit special. Even in the Empty Tomb Proclamation Narrative, it has significant features unique to itself—Mary Magdalene comes alone and there is the race between Peter and the Beloved Disciple. The appearances of the Risen Lord are also special to this Gospel. In this excerpt, we hear the substantial story of Thomas, in two parts, followed by the first conclusion of the Gospel. (Scholars often hold that chapter 21, while not original was added very early, and provides a second ending.)

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

"Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and *breathed* into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." (Genesis 2:7)

"Because they failed to know the one who formed them and inspired them with active souls and *breathed a living spirit* into them." (Wisdom 15:11)

"Wake up! Bestir yourself for my defence, for my cause, *my God and my Lord!*" (Psalms 35:23)

KIND OF WRITING

This symbolic narrative explores several

Thought for the day

How did any of us make the journey towards faith in Christ? No doubt a great part of it is simply what we received—usually from family. At some point, did I make a conscious choice? Perhaps at other times, I felt like walking away the faith project? What kept me going? Did a more personal ownership of faith result? Perhaps I felt the intuition of John O'Donahue, "Faith is helpless attraction to the divine." In spite of everything, in spite of myself, somehow it is part of who I am.

Prayer

Mysterious God, we are those who have seen and at the same time not seen. Help to look beyond the simple gifts of each day to see you the giver behind—and in—every gift. Help us embrace the grace that we may know true blessedness in believing.

dimensions of Easter faith: (1) the gifts of the Risen Lord—peace, joy and forgiveness; (2) the identity of the Risen One with the Crucified One; (3) the blessedness of all who believe, elimination any distinction between present believers and the very first generation of Christians. All three are important. Later generations may have been felt that earlier Christians, who actually encountered the Risen Lord were somehow more fortunate. Even more important, a later Christian heresy Docetism—which denied the reality of Jesus' humanity and its continued significance after the Resurrection—is countered by the realism of the body of Jesus raised.

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

(1) New creation in Christ is reflection in the lay-out of this Gospel, which start with an echo of Gen 1:1. Jesus' last words on the cross are an echo of Gen 2:2. John 20:1 explicitly recalls Gen 1:1 again and in the breathing Gen 2:7 is echoed.

(2) Holy Spirit / Advocate: in the Fourth Gospel, there is a wonderful and deep

presentation of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate. A single verse gives an idea of what is at stake: “Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” (John 7:39). It simply is not true that “as yet there was no Spirit”! Yet, the function of the Holy Spirit, in the light of the Paschal Mystery, is now so new, so different that *it is as if there had been no Spirit before*. “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” (John 14:26)

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” (John 16:7)

(3) Peace: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)

ST PAUL

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:14-17)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 19 That is, the day of creation. Jesus’ self-presentation is not limited by their fear. Peace here is the Easter good news of victory of death and fear of death.

Verse 20 That is, the Risen One is the Crucified and the Crucified is the Risen One. Jesus is both the same and utterly transformed. The first gift was peace, the second gift is joy.

Verse 21 Repetition for emphasis. “As” should read “just as” and means more than a formal similarity: Jesus’ very own mission from the Father continues in the mission of the disciples.

Verse 22 Echo of creation. The third gift is the Holy Spirit, in the new role of Advocate and reminder. A new creation

is Christ is a strong early Christian experience and proclamation. “For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!” (Galatians 6:15) “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2Corinthians 5:17) “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” (1Peter 1:3)

Verse 23 The third gift—to all believers—is forgiveness of sins.

Verse 24 Thomas featured earlier in the Gospel: John 11:16; 14:5.

Verse 25 Believe what? That he is risen? That it is the same Jesus?

Verse 26 I.e. the eighth day, that is, today. The same gift of peace is underlined.

Verse 27 The Risen Lord takes the initiative, by meeting the heart-felt questions and doubts of Thomas.

Verse 28 This is the highest proclamation of Jesus’ identity in this Gospel. Thus, deepest doubt can be the direct road to deepest faith. The words also counter the propaganda of the Roman emperors, one of whom wished to be addressed as “our lord and our God”, no less!

This is a beatitude, one of the twenty-seven New Testament such beatitudes. Most likely, the writer is meeting an anxiety at the time of writing when the third and fourth generations of Christians feel that the difference in time from the events of salvation puts them at something of a disadvantage. As RS Thomas puts it,

*It’s a long way off, but to get
There takes no time and admission
Is free, if you will purge yourself
Of desire, and present yourself with
Your need only and the simple offering
Of your faith, green as a leaf.*

Verse 29 This is the first ending of the Gospel and is a frank admission that the writer has selected. The second ending is in the same vein: “But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I sup-

pose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” (John 21:25)

Verse 30 This is a key text for understanding the nature of Gospels and in particular the kind of text which the Fourth Gospel is. The goal is a true understanding of the identity of Jesus so that believers may live in him.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. “Peace be with you” was the greeting of Jesus on meeting his frightened apostles. Who has come to you bringing peace at times when you were afraid? To whom have you been able to bring peace?

2. Thomas, doubting and questioning, is possibly a person with whom we can identify. What part have doubting and questioning played on your faith journey? How has your faith been strengthened by such moments?

3. Note the way that Jesus dealt with Thomas. He did not give out because he doubted. He accepted how he felt and led him along to see the truth of his resurrection. Who has been that kind of teacher for you, gently taking you where you were and leading you to a deeper knowledge about some truth about life? For whom have you been that kind of teacher?

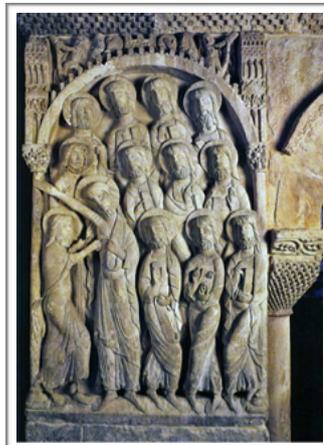
4. “Blessed are they who have not seen and yet believed”. That requires great trust. Perhaps you have had the experience of being trusted without having to justify every step along the way. What was it like to be trusted in that way? Who have you been able to trust in a similar manner?

PRAYER

God of life, source of all faith, through the waters of baptism you have raised us up in Christ and given us life that endures.

Day by day, refine our faith that we who have not seen the Christ, may truly confess him as our Lord and God, and share the blessedness of those who believe.

Grant this through Jesus Christ, the resurrection and the life, who lives and signs with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.



Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul

Acts 4:32 Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. 33 With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. 35 They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The ideal of sharing all things in common is prevalent in the culture at the time. A few citations may illustrate:

“Among friends everything in common is quite correct, for friendship consists in sharing.” (*Aristotle*) “True friends cling not to private property; their wealth is shared in close community.” (*Euripides*) “And if you need anything that is yours, write us, for my possessions, Plato, are by all rights yours, even as they were Socrates.” (*Socraticus to Plato*)

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

Possessions and poverty are a considerable concern of the Gospel according to Luke. This may reflect either the poverty of the first Christian communities in Jerusalem (who were poor—hence Paul's collection for them) or else the poverty of the community(ies) for which his is writing. Cf. Lk 6:20; 16:14, 18:22.

KIND OF WRITING

This is a summary statement of what was supposed to have happened generally. The summary is in a simple ABA' format, as follows:

A v.32 the community's common life
B v.33 a response to the petition in v. 29 (see above)
A' vv.34-35 – The common life of the community

As we see from the story of Ananias and Sapphira, it is a somewhat idealised portrait. We know rather more directly from the Pauline communities that conflict and strife (then as now) were the norm!

Earlier in Acts, there is another summary statement, equally idealised, in 2:43-47.

RELATED PASSAGES

(i) In general, to do with poverty and charity:

The poor are disliked even by their neighbours, but the rich have many friends. Those who despise their neighbours are sinners, but happy are those who are kind to the poor. Prov. 14:20-21 Cf. Prov 14:31 and 28:27.

(ii) In particular, an evocation of the Exodus story of the manna:

This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.’” The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. (Ex 16:16-19)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 32 This is the very model of Christian community (cf. Eph 4:1-6). There are, of course, tensions and issues, as may be seen in chapters 6, 10, 15 and 21. A constant theme in Luke-Acts is the role of possessions in discipleship (Lk 6:20-26; 12:13-21; 16:9, 19-31; 18:22-25; 19:1-27; 21:1; Acts 11:27-29). As we saw in the Introductory Observations, this was a widely admired ideal in Hellenistic culture at the time (not limited to religious groups such as the Essenes). The ideal is clear enough; however how it was actually put into practice is not so clear. Were all obliged? Was it an entry requirement? Would a partial sharing “do”? And so forth. Whatever the details, it was at least an aspiration of the first communities and we do know from Paul that the Jerusalem community was financially challenged as they say.

Verse 33 This is a summary statement of the proclamation, focused on the resurrection and, by implication, on the death of Jesus. The writer means the

whole Christ event. Grace (lit. favour, reflecting the Old Testament word *hesed*, meaning the gift of the covenantal love of God) is big in the Acts: Acts 2:47; 4:33; 6:8; 7:10, 46; 11:23; 13:43; 14:3, 26; 15:11, 40; 18:27; 20:24, 32; 24:27; 25:3, 9.

Verse 34 In this case, the sharing of goods is “inward”, that is, among the members of the Christian community. In the course of time, the vision of shared goods was extended to all in need. Cf. Luke 10:25-37.

Verse 35 I.e. at the disposal of the church, under the leadership of the apostles. This means that charity was not a private virtue but a mark of the community as a whole. In a few chapters time, this role is devolved upon the deacons (literally “servants”, who are called upon not to preach but to look after material goods so as to free the apostle for precisely preaching). Cf. the citation from Paul above.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Luke makes a link between spiritual sharing and practical community of goods. The sharing of goods (to be read widely, including skills, energies, gifts) does contribute to a sense of spiritual oneness. When has that been the case in my experience? Prayer of communion.

2. The ideal of union, oneness and communion is not always the reality I live and experience. What keeps me going when I fall short of the idea and what is that draws me back? Prayer of renewal.

3. Witnessing is a key part of being a disciple. What opportunities come my way to bear witness and how do I use them? Prayer of witness.

4. It is often much easier to give than to receive. As a person in need (of whatever kind), how has it been for me to find my needs met in the fellowship of believers? Prayer of thanksgiving.

PRAYER

God of Jesus Christ, who prayed that all may be one, as he is one in you and the Holy Spirit, help us all to work for unity among Christians that we may be witness to the Gospel in our time.

Teach us to share all that we have in freedom and joy that kingdom may be a reality in our lives today. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God,

1 John 5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. 3 For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, 4 for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. 5 Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

1 John 5:6 This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

From today, we hear from 1 John for five consecutive Sundays. No newer than five documents are associated with the name John in the New Testament. To take account of both similarities as well as significant differences between these various texts, scholars speak of the Johannine circle in early Christianity. The “letter” itself, 1 John, is anonymous.

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

The communities addressed by 1-3 John and the Gospel have experienced a kind of schism and some have walked away. The cause of the division is probably a combination of the high christology offered combined with the core affirmations of incarnation and the cross. That some have stumbled is attested in these passages:

Children, it is the last hour! As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us. (1John 2:18-19)

Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. (John 6:66)

KIND OF WRITING

2 and 3 John are real letters. 1 John is a mixed genre, sometimes called an epistolary sermon. It is not clear whether it was written for a single congregation or for broader circulation. Like other NT letters, it moves in and out of doctrinal exposition and moral exhortation.

This outline is taken from R. Alan Culpepper:

Prologue: The Word of Life (1:1-4)

I. God is light (1:5-2:27)

II. God is righteous 2:18-4:6)

III. God is love (4:7-5:12)

Epilogue: Assurances (5:13-21)

Within III, there are two subsections, 4:7-21 and 5:1-12.

- i. Faith, love leading to victory (5:1-4)
- ii. Faith and the Three Witnesses (5:5-9)
- iii. Faith God’s witness and life (5:10-12)

Our particular reading cuts across the sequence of thought somewhat.

RELATED PASSAGES

Shema Yisrael: Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:18)

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. (1John 4:7-12)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 1 To be born of God is familiar

in early Christianity in general and in the Johannine texts in particular. To be born mean to have a parent, that is God, and if you love the “parent” you must also love the child. Who is the child here? It could be Jesus or our fellow believer. In the context, it most likely points to the believer, so if we recognise God as Father, that very recognition includes the other children fathered by God. It may also hint that to know God as Father includes recognising Jesus as the Son.

Verse 2 This is almost a Johannine version of the *Shema* and the command to love God and neighbour (see above).

Verse 3a A comment by Archbishop Temple may help: *It is not that practice is most important and prayer helps but that prayer is most important and practice is its test.*

Verses 3b-4 They are not burdensome because of the victory of God and the gift of the Holy Spirit. John, like Paul, subscribes to “yes, we can”! Christ’s victory enables the person of faith to live the life of love.

Verse 5 This is the issue which caused the schism and the subject at the heart of much of 1 John. Faith here is more than a conviction: it is a relationship leading to a way of life.

Verse 6 This verse (the subject of controversy on account of a famous gloss added into vv. 7 and 8) takes us back to the real humanity of Jesus (then) and the current experience of the Spirit (now). The testimony is exterior (what happened to Jesus) and interior (the experience of believers). Cf. *But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.* (John 14:26)

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Peter McVerry is reputed to have said: “the good news is that God loves you; the “bad” news is that he loved everyone else just as much.” That’s our challenge!

2. The temptation, especially in highly liturgical traditions is to think that our love of God is “done” once worship is over. The prophets would not agree.

PRAYER

God—parent to us all—we are glad to call ourselves your children because everything good comes from you, life itself and above all love. Help us to live that love in such a way that we see fellow human beings not only as your children but as all our brothers and sisters, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE LITURGY

Act 4:32-35; Psalm 118 [117]; 1 John 5:1-6; John 20:19-31

READINGS 2 AND 3

Throughout Eastertide—as in Lent—the first reading from Acts is really on its own narrative track. Of course the Risen Lord is proclaimed but the real linked readings are 1 John and the Gospel of John. On this Sunday, the question of faith is to the fore: what does it mean to come to faith? What or who is the content of that faith? Are there consequences for the practical living of that faith in love?

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

The Psalm is really a generic responsorial psalm for Eastertide and does not directly address anything special in the reading. Perhaps the note of joy in the Psalm itself is implied in the very first verse in the reading: there *were of one heart and soul*, leading to that joy which is a mark of Lucan discipleship (Luke 1:14; 2:10; 8:13; 10:17; 15:7, 10; 24:41, 52; Acts 8:8; 12:14; 13:52; 15:3).

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First Reading

Acts 4:32-35

What does being a follower of Jesus mean? In this reading, we see that it includes a new “belonging” to the family of the faith, a belonging which implies community of goods and gifts.

Second Reading

1 John 5:1-6

If someone said to you, what does “loving” God mean, what would you reply? There is a threefold response in today’s reading – the first two are what you would guess but the third one is challenging.

Gospel

John 20:19-31

This is a justly famous and remembered story. Why was it written? To reassure people that later generations in the faith were not less fortunate than earlier generations. Perhaps we too may suspect that for people before us faith was somehow easier.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 13 April

Acts 4:23-31 A second Pentecost

What happens when we are challenged in our faith? Strength in witnessing can lead to a new experience of the Holy Spirit, as we hear in this reading.

Tuesday 14 April

Acts 4:32-37 The ideal community

What does being a follower of Jesus mean? In this reading, we see that it includes a new “belonging”, a belonging which implies community of goods and gifts.

Wednesday 15 April

Acts 5:17-26 The Lord looks after his witnesses

The story we are about to hear is not limited to the past. On the contrary, those who witness faithfully have an inner freedom that no outer pressure can harm.

Thursday 16 April

Acts 5:27-33

In this passage, Peter responds to those who would silence him. The clarity of his defence might help us today: obedience to God comes before obedience to humans.

Friday 17 April

Acts 5:34-42

If you ever found yourself trying to figure out is some proposal or other is good or bad, very good advice is given in this reading.

Saturday 21 April

Acts 6:1-7

Acts is quite realistic in that it reports tension between two groups of Jewish Christians, those who spoke Aramaic and those who spoke only Greek (the Hellenists). The Greek-speaking members complain and an arrangement is arrived at. Notice, however, that the “deacons” are not for preaching but for practical work!

REFLECTIONS

Young homeless people... When they hear the word ‘God’, they understand a being who judges and therefore condemns them. Their low sense of self-esteem convinces them that they are unlovable, not worth caring about, and so they are incapable of believing in a God who loves and cares for them. You cannot believe in a God who loves you unless you first love yourself.

— Fr Peter McVerry, SJ

Faith is helpless attraction to the divine.

— John O’Donohue

Faith is a challenge. Faith is a great risk. And, if you give yourself to it, faith is a wonderful adventure.... The proof is in the practice.

— Fr Eamon Devlin, CM

Belief... must be fed. And as a matter of fact, if you examined a hundred people who had lost their faith in Christianity, I wonder how many of them would turn out to have been reasoned out of it by honest argument? Do not most people simply drift away?”

— CS Lewis

The Doubting Christian is a true Christian, if the doubts come from the need and desire to find a fuller truth. We are not talking of an individualistic phenomenon. We don’t find truth or fuller truth simply on our own. The search for truth, like all of our enterprises, is social as well as personal. It is communal, something we do in interaction with people. The heart of the central doctrine of Christianity, the incarnation, is that God comes to us through one another.... We do not invent truth, we discover it. And the discovery of any truth is always some stage on the way to discovery of the fullness of truth, the final truth we call God.

— Fr Enda McDonagh

To choose what is difficult all one’s days as if it were easy, that is faith.

— W.H. Auden