

Sermon Notes from the Church’s Ministry Among Jewish People
Resurrection Sunday – Year B

RCL Readings – Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 ; I Corinthians 15:1-11 or Acts 10:34-43; Mark 16:1-8

ACNA Readings – Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:14-17, 22-24; Colossians 3:1-4 or Acts 10:34-43; Mark 16:1-8;

Seasonal Introduction. He is risen! He is risen indeed! These words encapsulate the joy and hope of our faith this Sunday. Resurrection Sunday marks the end of Lent and the beginning of a new season, known as Eastertide. Easter is more than a day; it is a season! Today, the Easter season starts with Resurrection Sunday and continues until Pentecost. It is a season of great blessing in Israel as this is the season of spring and the season of harvest—the season that proves the blessing of God to the righteous and wicked alike.¹

Common Theme. Resurrection is the common theme, as it should be. We have journeyed with Jesus through the wilderness. We have sat at His feet at Passover and heard the new commandment to love as He has loved. And we have come with Him to Jerusalem to face the cross. This journey is actually important to us as his disciples. Without Passover, Easter makes absolutely no sense. Without the death of the Messiah, you cannot have a resurrection; and without a resurrection, you cannot have the gospel. The gospel can be stated in one sentence—Messiah has defeated death.

Hebraic Context. The destruction of the First Temple and exile from Israel was a major theological shock for the Jewish people. Until the Babylonian Exile, the Temple of Solomon had stood in Jerusalem from the 10th Century through to the 6th Century BC. The Levitical priesthood had participated in the uninterrupted daily service of sacrificial worship for centuries. The Temple was the symbol of God’s very real presence amongst His people, a reminder of His covenant, a place of pilgrimage, and a place of learning. However, the presence of the Temple did not guard the people against idolatry.²

The Jewish people did not heed the warnings of the prophets and they were exiled from the land but even for those who remained, the Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.³

¹ The term Easter developed as a vernacular use of the word “spring” from old German in the 7th and 8th century A.D. Most languages outside German and English use a transliteration of the early Aramaic term for Passover (Pascha, from the Hebrew Pesach). The season of Pascha (Eastertide) originated long before the Gospel became popular in Germany and certainly does not have its roots in paganism.

² Archaeological discoveries of Israelite Iron Age I and Iron Age II cities are rife with idols. This is actually physical evidence that the message of the prophets and kings is true. The Bible also states that even the things dedicated to God became a problem of their own as both the Ark of the Covenant (I Samuel 4-6) and the Temple (Jeremiah 7:1-15) became an idol for the people.

³ Early Jewish scholars stated that the Temple was destroyed for three reason, “It was destroyed due to the fact that there were three matters that existed in the First Temple: Idol worship, forbidden sexual relations, and bloodshed.” (*Yoma* 9b.3)

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Dispersion and exile with no access to a temple caused some deep soul searching within the community. The priests, Levites, and people could no longer give daily sacrifice to God (as God had directed them to do) nor annually come to Jerusalem before the Lord to remember His great deeds. How could the people of the God of Israel continue in their relationship with Him when they were not in the land of Israel?

Many Jewish people learned from God's chastisement, exile and the destruction of the Temple, to heart and rebuilt their lives both physically and spiritually. While they had no access to the sacrificial system they could still repent, engage in prayer, read and study the Scriptures.⁴ We see Biblical characters such as Daniel remain faithful to God in diaspora without having the ability to attend Temple worship or make sacrifices. There were three daily sacrifices in the Temple, Shacharit (the morning sacrifice), Mincha (the afternoon sacrifice) and Ma'ariv (the evening sacrifice). This forms the pattern for the three daily prayers in Judaism.^{5 6}

Prayer had become more important than sacrifices as prayer could be performed by any worshipper at any time and in any location while Temple service could only be performed in one location—Jerusalem.⁷ Jesus declared that His Father's house was to be a house of prayer for all nations (not a house of sacrifice).⁸

⁴ Sacrifices in the Hebrew Bible are for unintentional sins, the only way to remove intentional sins was always through repentance.

⁵ While there is no actual specific command in the Hebrew Bible to pray, according to the sages in the Babylonian Talmud; prayer is a biblical command that can be inferred by the command to love God with your whole heart. They ask the question; "Which is the service of God that is performed in the heart? You must say that this is referring to prayer." (Taanit 2a.11)

⁶ Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said that the prayers were instituted based on the daily offerings sacrificed in the Holy Temple, and the prayers parallel the offerings, in terms of both time and characteristics. Berachot 26b

⁷ Sacrifice wasn't done away or replaced with prayer for those who lived close enough to Jerusalem to participate in God's prescribed order of sacrifice. Both prayer and sacrifice were ways to worship God. But the vast majority of the Jewish people lived in the diaspora and could not participate in Temple sacrifice.

⁸ When the apostle Paul visited and preached in synagogues throughout Asia Minor and Greece in the book of Acts, he didn't argue about how they couldn't deal with their sin since they couldn't come to the temple. As noted already, sin offerings were for unintentional sins and the people knew that repentance was always what God wanted. Paul simply explained that Jesus was the Messiah spoken of in Scripture and declared what God expected from His people. Just because someone happened to live close enough to Jerusalem to make a pilgrimage didn't mean that suddenly sacrifice was the most important thing—it was still the relationship with God that was important between God and His people, whether in the land of Israel or in the diaspora. (Which isn't to say that sacrifice wasn't important, it too was commanded by God.)

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Acts 10:34-43.⁹ Acts 10 is a major watershed moment in the early history of the Church. Prior to this the mission of the early church had been restricted to the Jewish and Samaritan peoples. The place setting of the event is also of importance. Cornelius, a Roman centurion of an elite Italian unit, was based in Caesarea—the administrative capital of the Roman occupation. Cornelius was identified as a God-fearer (a Gentile attracted to the monotheism of Judaism) who had actively participated in the life of the synagogue. Acts describe him as a generous supporter of the Jewish people despite being an integral part of the occupation force.

Cornelius engaged in the ritual daily prayers that had developed during the Babylonian captivity.¹⁰ ¹¹ In this time set aside for prayer, God told Cornelius to visit Peter. In turn, following an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Peter gave a short account of how he had learned that “the word that He sent to Israel” was also for people of every nation as he delivered the good news to Cornelius in Caesarea.

From this point, it was known that the gospel would go beyond Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria and should go even to the Gentiles as Peter declares that, “God shows no partiality.” The prevailing view of late Second Temple Judaism was that God did show partiality towards the Jewish people over the Gentiles.¹² But Peter now understood that the gospel should not be restricted to the Jewish community and that ‘He is Lord of all’.¹³ Peter stated that God would accept all those in every nation who “fears Him and does what is right”. Fear of the Lord (part of our faith) is balanced with acts of righteousness (or obedience). For Gentiles too, faith is an activity and obedience is born from faithfulness.

⁹ During the Season of Easter, it is common practice to read the sacred history from the book of Acts.

¹⁰ The prayer described in Acts 10:30 appears to be the Mincha afternoon prayer.

¹¹ As noted, during the 2nd Temple Period prayer had, in many forms, already replaced Temple sacrifices. See Hebraic Context.

¹² Gentiles were considered to be ‘unclean’, which was thought to be transferable upon contact. This view was likely true as the Gentiles did not practice God’s laws regarding ritual purity. However, ritual purity or impurity was never a question of personal sin. Ritual impurity, most commonly, was about the appearance of death—whether skin diseases that took on the appearance of death, emission of life-giving fluids, or even contact with the dead—and God created life, not death.

Thus, traditionally, Jewish people were prohibited from eating with Gentiles or even entering the house of a Gentile. Upon hearing of the events in Caesarea, the believing community in Jerusalem summoned Peter to answer the question “You went into uncircumcised men and ate with them?” (Acts 11:3). After Peter’s explanation, their response was “then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.” Both repentance (confession and prayer) and life (Jesus had conquered death and the grave and it was also extended to all who fear God and do what is acceptable to Him) were given to the Gentiles.

¹³ Modern Judaism also acknowledges that God has a universal aspect and is not only the God of Israel but also of all creation. Jewish prayer often begins, “Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe.”

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During Peter's summary of his preaching he declared that the gospel is more than a story of a good rabbi teaching love and kindness who ended up crucified on a tree. Peter testified to the personal witness of himself (and others) that the resurrection was true. His conclusion to Cornelius was the universal application that "everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name."

Isaiah 25:6-9. Isaiah, exalting in God, prophesied about a great banquet in the future that provided hope (Jesus may also have alluded to this banquet at the Passover in Matthew 26:29, where he said that he would drink of the vine again in his Father's kingdom.) Isaiah notes that this great feast, which is a banquet prepared by God Himself (described here as the Lord of hosts), takes place on earth on the holy mountain of Jerusalem (and not in heaven).¹⁴

In this passage, the prophet notes four great hopes that comprise the coming redemption which is linked to the great feast prepared by God. First, the blessing of God (in the form of food and drink) will come to all people.¹⁵ Second, the veil (or council) over the nations which hinders them from seeing God would be destroyed.¹⁶ Third, the great enemy, death, would be defeated.^{17 18} Finally, the rebuke against His people (the Jewish people) would be removed.

Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24.¹⁹ Many psalms call on the worshipper to thank and bless the Lord. The reason given in the opening verse of psalm 118 is because 'He is good'—which is, honestly, quite a general statement. However, simple truths can be as important as complex. Goodness and mercy are essential characteristics of God's nature with the psalm beginning and ending with the proclamation that "His mercy endures forever." God's mercy is linked with salvation in Psalm

¹⁴ Some commentators also pair the feast described in Isaiah with the 'Marriage feast of the Lamb' described in Revelation 19:9. It's possible that these both could be the same celebratory feast, however from Isaiah's prophecy the location is definitely not in heaven. The obvious context of John's revelation in chapter 19 is within heaven itself, even if the location of the marriage feast of the Lamb is not explicitly given.

¹⁵ Isaiah is very clear that Israel was to be a light to the nations. God's bounty would be available for all people—the LXX also makes this very clear, "every *ethnos*" (ἔθνος).

¹⁶ This is not a reference to the veil of the Temple. The veil in Hebrew is פרוכת (*peroket*) and is not in this passage, nor is καταπέτασμα (*katapetasma*) in the LXX translation. The LXX roughly translates the unusual Hebrew phrase as the council (or purpose) that is spread over all nations.

¹⁷ See also Hosea 13:14; I Corinthians 15:54-57; Hebrews 2:14-15; and Revelation 21:4 concerning God's defeat of death.

¹⁸ The result of sin: the sweat and blood needed to produce food; the council (lies) of the world and the enemy; and death itself will all be swallowed up.

¹⁹ Psalm 118 is the final psalm in the collection of psalms known as the Egyptian Hallel (Psalms 113-118). It does not give an author, however, Ezra 3:10-11 notes that during the dedication of the 2nd Temple they sang songs "according to the hands of David, king of Israel". The song they sang responsively (that Ezra gave as an example) appears to be the opening verse of Psalm 118, "giving thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever."

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118. The author declares that not only has God, in His mercy, brought salvation but that the Lord has “become my salvation”. The salvation is not removed from the very being of God Himself—I don’t have salvation, I know God who is my salvation.²⁰

The psalmist notes that, having received the steadfast love of the Lord, the righteous worshipper will respond by voicing aloud their joy and salvation—who is God. In verse 17 they do voice a very bold declaration that “I shall not die”. In context, this likely referred to some present crisis in the life of the author that they were preserved from. Similar to Psalm 88, the one who is not killed can continue to “recount the deeds of the LORD”. The worshipper can act in this way because of the Lord, “This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.” God is the salvation. God is the shield. God is acting. But we still want to dwell in the tents of the righteous, give thanks, and declare His works.

Jesus quotes Psalm 119:22-23 regarding God’s action when referring to Himself as the stone which the builders rejected (Mark 12:10-11).²¹ Psalm 118 bears prophetic understanding for many elements of Holy Week: beginning at the triumphal entry into Jerusalem (“Open to me the gates of righteousness that I may enter through them”);²² the rejection of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and the trial (“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”);

²⁰ Here the word salvation is *ישועה* *Yeshua*, which is also the name of Jesus in Hebrew. In the mystery that is the Godhead, the mystery of faith, and according to God’s plan, He has, indeed, become *Yeshua* in the person of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus means He will now live and reign forever. Having defeated death He will not die again. In this way, as well as many other mercies of God, the salvation of God will continue forever.

²¹ The Egyptian Hallel became part of the sung liturgy during Passover and was obviously on the lips of the crowds who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem. Verse 22-23 describe workmen involved in some construction in which the craftsmen reject some particular stone as unsuited for its original purpose. However they were wrong in their appraisal of that particular rock. Many English translations use the word ‘cornerstone’ for the *פִּנֵּה לְרֹאשׁ פִּנָּה* *Rosh Pina*. While the word *פִּנָּה* *Pina* does indeed mean corner, when its combined with *רֹאשׁ* *Rosh* the word for head, it actually implies a unique stone called a Capstone which is the top stone of a structure, usually an arch, which supports the weight of the building. There are several cornerstones but only one load bearing capstone, highlighting its uniqueness.

There is a midrash on Psalm 118 that describes the building of the Temple of Solomon. The construction was done in as much reverential silence as possible, so all stones for the Temple were cut and dressed off site and brought to Jerusalem (I Kings 6:7). Once the stones arrived they were set in place by the workmen. One particular stone arrived but did not seem to fit anywhere. Not in the walls and not in the foundations, thus it was cast aside as a mistake. As the Temple drew near to completion the workers discovered they needed one final stone to place in the last supporting arch. This arch would hold the whole Temple together, it was called the capstone or the *rosh pina* in Hebrew. As they looked around for a stone that would serve they discovered the stone they had initially rejected was indeed the one they actually needed.

²² Psalm 118:25-26 is also quoted in the triumphal entry, “*Hoshianu!*” save us.

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and possibly even His death and the resurrection (“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! ... Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!” along with “I shall not die, but I shall live”).

I Corinthians 15:1-11. The gospel, at its source, is about God's ultimate victory. That victory is over sin and death. Death is finally defeated by the resurrection of the Messiah. Paul urged the Corinthians to maintain the faith, “hold fast to the Word,” lest they believe in vain. Apparently, some in Corinth maintained that there was “no resurrection for the dead”. This belief leaves a large gap in our theology—if there is no resurrection, Jesus also did not rise to life but remained in the grave and there is no victory over the grave. The gospel becomes null and void without the resurrection!²³

In defense of the truth, Paul delivers concrete evidence and eyewitness accounts of the fact of the resurrection to the Corinthians. The detail of the 500 witnesses on one occasion (verse 6) is not recorded in the Gospels.²⁴ Matthew's gospel records many others being resurrected at the same time as Jesus and making their way into the city of Jerusalem. And following the resurrection, Jesus spent another 40 days continuing to teach his followers many things concerning the Kingdom of Heaven (Acts 1:3). Thus, while the gospels do not record the full number of eyewitnesses, there were many people who could now testify that He was indeed alive again!

²³ The problem in the Corinthian church has carried through to the modern era. One small scale survey (only around 2,000 people surveyed, many of whom were non-religious) in England, 2017, stated that only 69% of self-professed Christians believe in life after death and even fewer believe in the full Biblical account of the resurrection. This “progressive” theology, declaring that Jesus was not raised from the dead, is actually lauded by several priests within the Anglican church.

While some theology and doctrine can be debated between good Christians, what is left for a Christian if God has no authority, power, or victory over sin and death? What is left for us if God (and the Prophets and Apostles who inform our faith) is a liar? (I Corinthians 15:12-19)

²⁴ Paul also mentions that Jesus appeared to his brother James. James, who was known to oppose Jesus before His resurrection but after seeing His resurrected brother became the first great Bishop of the Church. James, called the Just, who was martyred after witnessing his brother, who had been dead but was now raised from the dead and ascended to heaven by the power and authority of God.

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Mark 16:1-8.²⁵ The women who followed Jesus played an important role as witnesses to both the crucifixion and the resurrection.²⁶ In all the Gospel accounts, it is Mary Magdalene who is a prominent figure at the tomb of Jesus. And in the case of John's Gospel, Mary Magdalene is the only woman mentioned, although when speaking with Jesus she uses the personal pronoun "we," indicating there are other people present.²⁷ Interestingly, out of all the Marys mentioned at the tomb, Mary the mother of Jesus is not among them. Most likely she is under the care of the disciple whom Jesus loved and remained in Jerusalem.

The passage opens with providing the specific time of the narrative. Despite the pain that the followers of Jesus felt, they very clearly took the Sabbath rest, "On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment." The earliest they could arrive at the tomb was the conclusion of the Sabbath. Mary Magdalene traveled before dawn (according to John) and the remainder of the women arrive around the time of the sunrise. But the tomb was already empty. The resurrection, therefore, occurred on what is known as מוצאי שבת *motze shabbat* the going out of the Sabbath.²⁸

While there was a belief in the resurrection in 1st Century Judaism it was usually attached to the future Messianic Age. The disciples of Jesus were certainly not expecting Jesus to come back to life anytime soon. On their way to the tomb, the women were not expecting to find an empty tomb as they asked themselves, "who will open the tomb for us". However, the women encountered an angel, a messenger, and he had one of the greatest messages of all time. The angel who stood guard over the empty tomb proclaimed the good news for both the ladies and for us today. "You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; He is not here."

The angel contrasted Jesus' former state "He was crucified" (Jesus was definitely dead) with His current state 'He is risen' (Jesus is alive). The angel also gives us further instructions, "Go and

²⁵ The Gospel of Mark ends rather abruptly. The two oldest surviving Greek manuscripts do not contain the last 12 verses (9-20) and it is contested as to whether they should be considered canonized Scripture. It appears as though some part of the original document did not survive transmission. There is the instruction to inform Peter and the male disciples and also the promise to encounter Jesus in the Galilee, but these events never happen in Mark and there is no satisfactory explanation as to why.

²⁶ Matthew 26:31, 56 and, to a lesser extent, John 16:32 state that the disciples would all abandon Jesus. None of the 12 apostles are mentioned in the Crucifixion narratives (with the possible exception of John in John 19:26-27, although there is a strong argument that the disciple whom Jesus loved was Lazarus.)

²⁷ John 20:3, later, in John 20:11-18, the narrative switches to a personal pronoun "I".

²⁸ Jesus remained in the grave for 3 days (but not 72 hours). Jesus died several hours before Shabbat started. Jesus remained in the grave over Shabbat, a Sabbath's rest, and rose from the grave early the following day (which starts at sundown Saturday evening). This is why the Great Saturday Vigil is so joyous at its conclusion. The following Easter Sunrise service then shows the world that the tomb truly was empty, as witnessed and testified to by the women and the disciples.

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tell.” The resurrection is something we must carry forward with us every day. We are commanded and invited to participate in proclaiming the good news of the resurrection.²⁹

Hebraic Perspective. The concept of resurrection is not something new to the New Testament. There isn't a lot of teaching on resurrection in the Hebrew Scriptures, however they do record several physical resurrections.³⁰ Resurrection does appear in the prophetic scriptures, such as the resuscitation of the dry bones (Ezekiel 36). By the 1st century II Maccabees 7 is explicit concerning the resurrection. As seven brothers are martyred for their faith in God, they (and their mother) continuously look to God for their strength but also, by God's grace, the hope of everlasting life.³¹ By the Middle Ages, the resurrection had become a core doctrine of Judaism. The medieval Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides included the belief in the resurrection in his 13 principles of the Jewish faith: “he who says there is no resurrection has no share in the world to come.”³²

When Jesus approached Martha and told her Lazarus would rise from the dead she responded, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Judaism understood and believed in the resurrection, but it was part of the Messianic age to come—an eschatological event. The disciples were also confused when Jesus spoke of His coming death and resurrection. It was only after those events that they understood that Jesus wasn't talking of some far off event but something that would be present and influence the entirety of their lives.

Jesus declared Himself as the resurrection and the life, inviting belief in Him as the source of eternal life. It's natural to view resurrection as a future event (like we view heaven or the world to come), but Jesus' words challenge us to recognize its present reality as well. We can be transformed by living in a present reality of the resurrection, as the martyrs have. Even the disciples, who knew of the future resurrection, surely would have found strength and resolve in God had they better understood the immediacy and present reality of Jesus' victory over death. We too should embrace Jesus' victory over death for that is good news forevermore—but also right now. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed, Hallelujah!

²⁹ We do proclaim Jesus' resurrection each Sunday as we celebrate the Eucharist, “We celebrate the redemption He has won for us; we proclaim His perfect sacrifice made once for all upon the cross, His mighty resurrection and glorious ascension; and we look for His coming to fulfill all things according to your will.” And so we can proclaim the great mystery of faith, “Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life, Lord Jesus, come in glory.”

³⁰ Elijah resurrects the child of a widow that he was staying with in Zarephath (1 Kings 17). Elisha does something similar to the son of a Shunamite woman (2 Kings 4) and then there is the extremely lucky unnamed man who, when thrown into the tomb of Elisha, comes back to life (2 Kings 13).

³¹ After six of her sons were killed before her, the mother turned to her youngest and final son and said “Accept death, so that in God's mercy I may get you back again with your brothers.”

³² The *Amidah*, the standing prayer, which is recited three times a day includes the statement of God, “You resurrect the dead. You are powerful to save.”

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ACNA Readings

Colossians 3:1-4. Paul's message to the Colossians in this short passage is that we should live the resurrection. The resurrection is not only a past or future event but something that should be lived out by the followers of Jesus. Our practical faith walk is founded on the theological truth that Messiah has been raised from the dead and has ascended to heaven. Jesus is our life. He doesn't simply give us life. Before the breath of God there was simply formed dust but after the breath of God there was a living creature. Before Jesus we "were dead in [our] trespasses" but in and through Jesus we are alive. Paul would suggest that, given this truth, we should now hold on to a different world view—"Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."³³

³³ Paul continues in the next two paragraphs explaining what the two options—the things of earth and the things that are above—look like in practical details.