

Sermon Notes from CMJ
Second Sunday of Easter – Year B

RCL Readings: Acts 4:32-35, Psalm 133, 1 John 1:1-2:2, John 20:19-31

ACNA Readings: Acts 3:12a, 13-15, 17-26 or Isaiah 26:1-9, 19; Psalm 111; 1 John 5:1-5;
John 20:19-31

Introduction – Eastertide, the season of Easter, is 50 days long. It follows the pattern of the Jewish calendar with 50 days from Passover to *Shavuot* or Pentecost. This season's traditional greetings of “He is risen!” and “He is risen indeed!” can bring hope and light to our broken world. As a very smart man, Jaroslav Pelikan, once said, “If Christ is risen, nothing else matters, and if Christ is not risen, then nothing else matters.”

Common Theme – The impact of the resurrection holds a central place in our readings this week. The resurrection is not just a theological necessity; it is also a biological reality. Our readings all testify to eyewitness accounts of the physical nature of the resurrection of Jesus.

First Reading: Acts 4:32-35 – The sacred history recorded in Acts 4 emphasizes two behavioural effects among the believers after Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Verse 31 says they were “filled with the Holy Spirit and preached the word of God boldly.” Verse 32 says that the believers were of “one heart and one mind” expressing their compassion for each other through the mutual sharing of material benefits. I do not think this is proof text for a socialist kibbutz movement. Rather, in light of the resurrection, there was a practical acknowledgement among the believers that all things belong to God for the use and blessing of his people. The resurrection produced a confidence and boldness as well as a compassion and common love in the community.

Second Reading: Psalm 133 – This song of ascent is one of the shortest psalms in the Bible, Psalm 117 being the shortest. As pilgrims would journey upwards towards Jerusalem, they would often recite and sing these prayers of ascent (Psalms 120-134). Despite its short size, the psalm proclaims something extraordinarily powerful, that there is a divine blessing that comes from unity, which is the presence of God. Jesus also says, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them.” Unity does not mean that we all theologically think alike. Rather it is that we “sit” or “dwell” together. Unity is a behaviour. United we stand and divided we fall, but more than that, unity attracts the Divine.

Third Reading: 1 John 1:1-2:2 – The opening verse is very reminiscent of the Gospel of John. The epistle begins by stating that John has been an eyewitness to the resurrected Messiah, described as the Word (*logos*) of life. References to having eaten with the Messiah and having touched him add proof to the bodily resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection is more than a theological construct. It is a historical fact. The Messiah is also called “eternal life,” having preexisted with the Father before becoming man to “fellowship with us.” As eternal life, he is the opposite of eternal death. John brings attention to God’s nature of light, the opposite of darkness.

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The connection with God and light begins in Genesis and continues throughout the Psalms and Prophets. The coming redeemer, the Messiah, was also thought of as God’s light (*Bereishit Rabbah* 1:6, *Midrash Tanchuma Terumah* 7:1, *Ner Mitzvah* Vol. 1:10, among others). Verse 7 reminds us of our response and obligation to that light—we must walk in it. Part of that walk is confession of sins (v. 9).

Fourth Reading: John 20:19-31 – The second Sunday in Easter is the eighth day of the season, Easter Sunday being the first day. Hence the lectionary assigns John 20 as the reading, which notes that Thomas was in the room with the disciples eight days following the resurrection. Some Orthodox churches call this day Thomas Sunday. The Gospel begins with Jesus entering a locked room to greet his disciples. The room is “locked for fear of the Jews.” The Jews mentioned here are the Jewish leadership of the temple that conspired with the Romans in the death of Jesus. Perhaps the same fate now awaited them, thus the disciples were scared, nervous, uncertain of current events and unsure of the future. Then Jesus appears. It is a miracle. The witness accounts from the women at the tomb are confirmed, and the resurrection is true and certain.

In that context Jesus proclaims, “Shalom” (שָׁלוֹם, Peace)! The word is more than a Hebrew greeting of blessing and is packed with multiple levels of meaning. Shalom comes from the verb “to pay” (לְשַׁלֵּם). From the same Hebrew root you make the word *shalem* (שָׁלֵם) which means “whole”—that is, 100 percent or everything. How did Jesus bring peace? He paid for the sins of the world, and he paid it in full, the whole amount—all of that wrapped up in one word, “shalom” (שָׁלוֹם).

Jesus then breathes on them so they may receive the Holy Spirit, which has echoes of Genesis and the breathing of the spirit into Adam. The relationship with this reception of the Holy Spirit and Pentecost in Acts 2 is not an easy one to discern. (Please see our podcast on [Acts of the Holy Spirit](#) for further exploration in this matter.) This Gospel passage also includes the “Johannine Commission.” The sent one—that is, Jesus of Nazareth—is now becoming the sender. The Father has sent the Son, and now the Son is sending us. That call continues for us and our communities today. Despite our fears and anxieties that we face in this world, we can have the peace of God, for the risen Messiah has paid the price. Filled with the Spirit and in the power of the resurrection, we can answer the call to go to this broken world bringing peace and forgiveness.

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ACNA Addendum

Acts 3:12-26 – Peter’s first sermons (Acts 2 and Acts 3) both occur in the temple precincts, demonstrating the important role that the temple continued to play in the lives and faith of the disciples. In both speeches, Peter emphasizes the veracity of the resurrection through the testimony of eyewitnesses. Jesus is called the Holy One, a term used in the Hebrew Bible more than 40 times as a title of God the Father. This is an obvious divine exaltation of Jesus by Peter, and yet, interestingly, he is not challenged as a blasphemer. The Holy Spirit and the truth of the resurrection have given the apostle much boldness to proclaim the Good News.

Isaiah 26:1-9 – This passage begins with the phrase “in that day” and points towards the messianic era also known as the “days of the Messiah.” The context of Isaiah is Assyrian expansion, uncertainty, and a potential Babylonian incursion. The prophet declares that, amidst the lack of surety, we have a “strong city.” In Jewish exegetical tradition, the rabbis note that cities came into existence after the fall of man. Genesis records that Cain built a city after the murder of Abel. Cities in the Bible are not held up as something positive, with biblical history ever really recording a truly godly city. Isaiah declares that the city of God is salvation and is open to the righteous among the nations. That salvation continues to be proclaimed in the resurrection of Jesus.

Psalms 111 – This is a song of praise which proclaims and celebrates the mighty deeds of the Lord. The works of God include his calling of a people through the covenant and his protection of and provision for that people. God has performed many great deeds. The actions of God give insight to his character. We know more of God through what he has done and in studying his deeds. The final line of the psalm reflects the thoughts of Proverbs 1:7, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Wisdom is not often a quality or characteristic that our society values highly as opposed to other values or characteristics. Rarely do we say of our children, “I hope they grow up to have wisdom in the truth.” More commonly we hope our children grow up to be “brilliant, happy and successful.” While there is nothing wrong with desiring success and blessing for the next generation, the Bible explicitly desires we seek wisdom, the application of knowledge and understanding. Tertullian commented on this verse saying, “Wisdom produces seriousness, thoughtful diligence, a modest gait, anxious carefulness, a safe-guarded community, submission to authority, devout attendance and a united church, and God in all things.”

1 John 5:1-5 – John reminds us that faith in God and the love of God go hand in hand. Love here is not an emotion nor a feeling but an action. Obeying the commandments in Scripture is the way to “love the children of God.” Jesus has overcome death through the resurrection. Faith and trust in the truth of the resurrection can bring about a modification of behaviour to love our fellow man. God's commands, as well as the actions of Jesus, reveal the way to love each other. The gospel is counter-cultural, and in this sense we can “overcome” the world. We do not succumb to

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the hostility of the world, nor to hate, nor to individualism. Rather we “overcome” to genuinely engage in actions of love, compassion, mercy and grace to each other. These actions of love will be a light that shines in the darkness—for these are not deeds of darkness—and attract people to the truth of the resurrection.

About the author – The Rev. Aaron Eime is the deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master’s program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and Hebrew. He has taught internationally, including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.