

The Lectionary with Vicar

The appointed readings for this upcoming Sunday are taken from Acts 5:29-42; I Peter 1:3-9; and John 20:19-31. I encourage you to open your Bibles and read through these passages with me.

Acts 5:29-42

Peter and James had just been preaching in the temple courts, when they were arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin – the same group that condemned Jesus. Part of the reason they were arrested this time is because they were supposed to be in prison already, but an angel broke them out of prison. Now we arrive at our text, where Peter gives his response to the Sanhedrin when questioned.

Peter begins with a brief overview of the gospel in verse 30-32. First, Christ was raised from the dead after the authorities had crucified him. The result of this is repentance and forgiveness of sins. Finally, Peter marks out that they are witnesses by the power of the Holy Spirit. These 3 verses are a concise explanation of the Gospel message – it hits all the important points and compresses the story about as much as possible.

The larger portion of this reading includes the response of the Sanhedrin. Gamaliel, one of the teachers – who is also known for being the teacher of Saul, who would eventually become Paul, counsels that they do not act yet, but rather they should leave it in God's hands. If the disciples are really teaching the truth, the God is on their side. If not, God will be against them. As we know today, the Gospel message has spread to all corners of the world instead of dying out.

So, the two takeaways: First, the Gospel message is more important than including all the details. A concise explanation that includes on the essentials for faith is what is truly important. Second, if the power of God stands behind the gospel message, no efforts of Satan, this world, or humanity can ever stop its spread as it goes around creating faith in the hearts of people.

I Peter 1:3-9

Peter opens his letter by writing about the hope that we have in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As in our first lesson, Peter leads with the resurrection. From there he moves through the promise that comes from the resurrection and into the nature of faith. First, faith is tested and refined by trials. Second, faith is the loving trust in Christ that leads to salvation.

I want to draw your attention especially to this last point, which is brought out in verses 8 and 9 in our treading. Here Peter is talking about the nature of faith. Those who do not see still love Christ and believe in Him. It sounds similar to what the author of Hebrews writes, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). So, faith is belief without proof.

This is not to say that Peter is calling for blind trust. He will go on to give further proofs from the scriptures as well as His own witness. But he is saying that our faith rests on the message that is handed down to us, rather than resting on what our eyes see or what our hands touch. The conclusion of this short section focuses us on the outcome of faith: the salvation of our souls – that is, forgiveness and life.

John 20:19-31

Finally, in our Gospel reading, we read the story of Jesus appearing twice to His disciples, first without Thomas, and then again when Thomas is present. Here we see the themes from the previous two readings come together in the story of Thomas who did not believe without physical proofs of the resurrection, followed by a brief conclusion where John explains his motives for writing his gospel.

This reading contrasts Thomas, who required proofs before he would believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, with the ones who are reading the Gospel itself, who ought to be convinced by the things written in the books. Thomas does not have faith without sight, while the readers of the gospel – including you and me – believe without seeing. This can be seen by comparing the first story in this section – Jesus appears to the disciples and they tell Thomas who disbelieves, with the second story – Jesus appears to the disciples and Thomas and one of them writes the story down so that everyone may believe.

And the last two verses nicely summarize not only the text for this Sunday, but the entire gospel: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.” The purpose of the Gospel writers is not to include every detail; they are trying to tell us what we need to know to see Christ – and Christ then takes over the work, showing us His hands and feet, the wounds He received for our sakes.

A Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, by showing Your wounds You created faith in the heart of Thomas and Your other disciples. Grant that as I come to see you through Your Word, I too may come to greater faith in You when I am made a witness of all that You have done for my sake – Your life, death, and resurrection. In Your most precious name I pray. Amen.