

10-11 #22

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Colossians 3:1-4

John 20:1-18

Acts 10:34-43

Christ As Judge

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

These 9 verses are the life of Jesus in a nutshell: pure Christology. That is why it is placed on this Easter Sunday lectionary. It is a part of the section of Acts where Luke writes about the Baptism of the Church with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. This short section begins with the primary grand lesson that is learned from Peter in his experience with Jesus – that God shows no partiality – God is ruler of all. And then Peter flashes back to show how this proof came about. It reminds me of a paper I wrote in college for a science journal once. The formula for such things was always the same, you started out with your hypothesis and then set about to prove it or disprove it.

How big a deal was this, that God is the ruler for all? We have gotten used to this idea, but in ancient times the boundaries were very clear – the Jews had one God, the Gentiles others . . . and everyone had clear boundaries to their faith.

Some of you know that twice in these last 3 weeks I had been invited to be a panelist at interfaith dialogues at Frederick Community College. The first week was discussions between the quote, unquote, “Western Religions” (all of which were founded in the Middle East), being Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Baha’i. The week after were “Eastern” religions; Buddhism, Hinduism, and Krishna Consciousness. And last Wednesday we had discussions between the two - East and West.

The first 2 weeks each faith seemed to be placing forth who they are so that the audience could see the differences and similarities themselves. There were some discussions about why interfaith conversations were important, but the focus had been on information giving. This past week, however, the discussions were different. This time the 9 of us on the panel were told to focus on speaking *with each other* about the various questions that were asked. It was to be a form of modeling for others in interfaith discussions.

My sense is that we started out carefully, not knowing each other nor how we might respond to this forum, but as we came to listen to each other and trust each other that we weren’t going to argue and judge, we got excited about the harmony and understanding that was developing. We spoke of love, of hope, of trust, of humanity, of compassion, in a non competitive way.

And I believe I can feel a bit of what Peter must have felt when he first discovered that Jesus’ message was that of unbiased-ness about external factors and looking at the heart of the people.

How difficult was it for Peter to “give up” being a Jew? We can only imagine. But he did so when he confessed that he had met the Messiah and it was Jesus. He witnessed the death and the resurrection and now the Baptism of the church through the gift of the Holy Spirit – where all were united in faith – Jews and Gentiles.

“³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ – he is Lord of all . . . [H]ow he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.”

The all inclusive message of the Christ is based on preaching peace, doing good, and healing the oppressed. Christ spent his life with the people of society that seemed to be beyond redemption. He was criticized for hanging out with the outcasts and sinners. He challenged the authorities by pointing out to them how closely tied they were to earthly power and far away from the grace of God they were when he road into Jerusalem as a peaceful King. He went into the temple and laid claim to it, whipping those who had turned the Temple into a common market place in stead of a house of God, as though *he* was in authority there and not the Sanhedrin. He had a way of making people look bad when according to the external human laws, they were the good guys! They had the letter of the law and Jesus had the compassionate heart of God who loves all his children and wants to help them and heal them.

“⁴²He 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*. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

‘Jesus as Judge’, at first it sounds like such a fearful experience. Just the word, “judging” alone can bring terror into anyone’s heart, because we are so used to human judges who can be cruel and punitive, and this form of judgment isn’t always helpful to bringing about positive change.

Punishment without the effort to help the guilty party to face their crimes and learn how not to do such things again is very human and yet also very wasteful of humanity. True love takes the time to find out what the cause of sin is and to help that person to overcome their sins so they can learn and grow and teach mercy and justice to others who are suffering.

Jesus’ mercy is not for the receiver alone – it is to be a chain reaction to bring healing to the whole world. So when we think of Jesus as Judge, we have to remember that he came to heal the world. His judgment is a blessing – it is empowering – it is full of mercy.

Because of Christ we know that God will not leave us alone as we deal with the issues of humanity. Believing in Christ is an opportunity, Christ as judge is a Grace. There is no need to fear that we aren’t good enough for Christ – there is grace aplenty!

When Jesus was killed, a lot of people lost hope in God’s mercy and justice. They were lost and confused. So on that morning when it was discovered that Jesus did not die – that God had brought their Lord back to life – they understood fully that their hope for justice and mercy was not lost. When he returned from the dead – an end that was the greatest punitive decisions that man could think of – the promise of justice and mercy was shown to be immortal and the judgments of humanity trivial.

We are called on this glorious Easter morning to preach healing and mercy. To know that God is immortal and grace is unending. We know this through our Lord, Jesus, who is the Christ, who is our savior, who is loving and compassionate and kind. Thanks be to God! Amen