

Scripture Readings and Sermon

April 24, 2022 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Revelation 1:4-8

The seven churches in "Asia" refers to the churches along the western side of modern day Turkey across the sea from Greece. John's introduction invokes the divine name of God given to Moses. The word often written as Yahweh is the Hebrew verb "to be" in its past (was), present (is), and future (is to come) perfect tense. The term "seven spirits" in numerology means "perfect" or "holy" spirits since seven means completion or holy. This is another way of saying Holy Spirit. John then lists the names of Jesus Christ: faithful witness (was), firstborn of the dead (is), and ruler (is to come). The next description of God is the one who loves (Father), the one who delivers (Jesus), and the one who anoints (Holy Spirit). After praising the Trinity, John then places this later as a future epiphany or revelation of Christ (the one who is "pierced") when Jesus returns. The passage ends with the total Trinity saying "I am the Alpha and Omega" meaning God is everything from the first to the last. Revelation 1:5-6 To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood and made us to be a

kingdom, priests serving his God and Father

Why does John Wesley emphasize grace and responsibility?

Could it be that grace without responsibility is like faith without works – dead?

What does this passage tell us about our responsibility?

Do you feel like or act like a priest?

What is a priest? Someone who wears robes or someone who prays on behalf of others?

What does St. Francis mean when he says pray always and use words if necessary?

Have your actions made the kingdom of God real for others?

Commentary on John 20:19-31

The Gospel of John, written some sixty years after the resurrection, was aimed at an audience who were beginning to realize that the second coming may not happen as soon as they originally believed. It is this doubt that is reflected not only in Thomas but in all the disciples. Even after the women had proclaimed Jesus' resurrection and, according to Luke, two of their own had encountered Jesus on the road, the disciples were "locked" in a room because of fear. When Jesus comes the first time, he doesn't just say "Peace be with you" once but twice. Jesus, "a week later", finds the disciples still behind the same shut doors and for a third time has to tell them "Peace". Thomas who missed the first time is just as doubtful as the other disciples had been and simply requested the same proof. For John, Thomas represents the new generation of believers who were demanding the second coming in order to affirm their faith. To these believers, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." This becomes the creed of faith for the young church who was beginning to realize that it may be a while before Jesus returned.

John 20:21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

What does it mean to you that "Christ has no hands but yours"?

Do you feel sent by Jesus?

Where do doubting Thomases go today to encounter Jesus?

Where do you go to find peace? Who do you know that has peace?

Do others find the peace of God in you?

Are you the Body of Christ to your friends and family?

Commentary on Acts 5:27-32

The old Sunday School song tells the story of Peter and John who went to Temple to pray and "met a lame man on the way". What the song doesn't say is after the man went "walking and leaping

and praising God", people started crowding around the apostles looking for healing. It gets so bad that people began laying the sick "on cots and mats, in order that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he came by." Not only was the Gospel message being lost in the enthusiasm for the "new healer" but the Jewish leaders saw a repeat of the problem they saw with Jesus. Peter and John were immediately arrested by the Lord opened the prison doors and the apostles went right back to preaching. This is where today's story picks up. Despite Peter's bold words, however, records of Peter preaching in Jerusalem end. This may be due to the fact that the council had decided to ignore Peter rather than make him a martyr or it could be because Peter became frightened after Stephen's execution by stoning is in the next chapter. Either way, after this speech by Peter and the execution of Stephen, the Book of Acts moves beyond Jerusalem with the story of Saul's conversion to Paul.

Acts 5:29 We must obey God rather than any human authority.

Have you ever had to choose between God and human authority?

Was it easier to follow someone who says they speak for God?

Have you ever found that those who say they are Christians lack Jesus' love?

When have you ever had to challenge another Christian?

Can you relate to Peter who was speaking to the religious leaders of his day?

Do you have faith in God or institutions and media?

Reflection on Revelation 1:4-8, John 20:19-31, Acts 5:27-32

Sermon "Why are you hiding?"

Even after the women testified that Jesus had risen and, according to Luke, two men had encounter Jesus on the road to Emmaus, the disciples were still hiding in fear. They simply could not believe the good news that Jesus was risen after they witnessed the his torture and execution. When Jesus appeared, it must have been too good to be true for they had to touch Jesus to make sure. Jesus gives them the peace of God not once but a total of three times. People usually focus on the doubt of Thomas, but it should be pointed out that even after Jesus had given the other disciples peace, proved he was risen, and sent them in the power of the Holy Spirit, they were still in behind locked doors a week later. It is not just Thomas who is admonished but all the disciples.

Today, many are still hiding behind locked doors. Some, like the disciples after Jesus' death, are in locked rooms because they are afraid and hurting. In order to survive in the world, people learn to hide their brokenness. People post pictures on Facebook or chat with their friends and all the while a part of themselves is locked away in an upper room. Jesus, however, goes past our pretense and enters into our most broken places. He cries out that he loves us and fills our void with his peace. This encounter can be as dramatic as the one John recorded in Revelation or it can be a still small voice in the midst of our chaotic life. Either way, when you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you will have an upper room moment. Great or small, these moments are not just for us but are meant to be shared. Jesus did not just give them peace but sent them out in power.

Sometimes people are behind locked doors not because of their brokenness but because they are afraid. Afraid that people will not listen or worse not care when they share their experience with Jesus. Afraid that in telling the story they have to also admit how broken they were. Peter was also afraid but when he accepted the Holy Spirit, he began to proclaim Jesus even after being arrested. Why? Peter felt compelled by God to share the good news. When he saw people hungry for wholeness, he could not pass them by. Today, there are people who need to hear your story. They need to know that they are not alone in the upper room. Maybe you are one of those people. If you are, then know that Jesus is there not just because of the stories in the Bible but because he was there for me and hundreds of others I have spoken with over the length of my ministry. Jesus is risen - let us go tell the world!