

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Third Sunday of Easter (A)

Acts 2.14a, 36-41

Psalm 116.1-3, 10-17

1 Peter 1.17-23

Luke 24.13-35

From Easter through Pentecost the Old Testament lesson is replaced by a lesson from the Acts of the Apostles. The readings from Acts focus on the birth of the Church in Jerusalem (reporting, *e.g.*, the sermons of Peter and Stephen). The Gospel readings are generally from John, focusing on the post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus to His disciples. This week, a resurrection appearance as recounted by Luke is used.

Acts. 2.14a, 36-41

1. This lesson is taken from Peter’s sermon delivered after the Holy Spirit has just come upon the Church at Pentecost, *i.e.*, its hearers have just witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
2. Having delivered a long sermon in which Peter recites all the proofs of Jesus being Lord, he now calls for repentance, and his hearers respond.
 - a. Repentance and baptism are and have always been the actions necessary to become members of Christ’s Body.
 - i. This gives the lie to the practice of “open communion,” in which the unbaptized may receive eucharist.
 1. The Gospel requires a response!
3. Peter calls on his hearers to be “baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ”. This formula appears *only* in Acts. The formula required by the Church is that recited first at Matthew 28, that baptism is in the “name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”.
 - a. The Church does not consider a baptism “in the Name of Jesus Christ” (*only*) to be a valid baptism.
 - b. The formula has a confessional sense, not just an incorporational sense (as in Gal. 3.27).

Psalm 116.1-3, 10-17

1. An individual song of thanksgiving. The language of the psalm (including many Aramaic expressions) points to a late date of composition (post-Exile).
 - a. In the *Septuagint* text tradition, this psalm is divided into two psalms, with vv. 1-9 being psalm 114, and vv. 10-19 being psalm 115. (The *Septuagint*, or Greek version of the Old Testament, numbers the psalms differently.)
2. As structured here, the psalm reflects the psalmist’s distress, the LORD’s response, and the faith of the psalmist in his vow.
 - a. The psalmist refers repeatedly to the Name of the LORD.
 - i. The Name has power, which is why it is not pronounced.
 - ii. The Hebrew letters transliterated as YHWH are not pronounced, but rendered as “the LORD” (all capitals).
 - iii. Some Bibles (and in some cases our prayer book) do write out a phonetic Name of the LORD, but it is traditional not to pronounce this, but to say “the LORD”.

1 Peter 1.17-23

1. Scholars have disputed the Petrine authorship of this work, but the majority opinion is that Peter actually wrote (or dictated) this letter, with his scribe adding certain specifically Greek expressions.
 - a. As such, the letter was probably written just before Peter died in the persecution under Nero.
2. Peter now exhorts his hearers to a life of holiness, reminding them of the price which has been paid for their salvation by Jesus.
 - a. The fact that Christians can call God “Father” does not excuse careless conduct.
 - i. Such intimacy increases responsibility.
3. The “exile” Peter refers to (v.18) is not here a reference to Christians being exiles from their true citizenship in heaven, but to the social ostracism that they may feel in this life.
 - a. Not living in the way of the world *will* lead to exclusion by the worldly.
4. Facing death at the time of the Neronian persecution, Peter can still focus on God’s eternal plan. His words that Jesus was “destined before the foundation of the world” (v. 20) to effect God’s plan probably reflect an ancient creedal statement.
 - a. He can also focus on new birth (v. 23). The reception of the Gospel by faith brings about new life.

Luke 24.13-35

1. The story of Jesus with the disciples on the road to Emmaus is unique to Luke, and contains themes which he emphasizes: journey, faith as seeing, and hospitality.
2. The two disciples have, in effect, abandoned their faith, for they state that they “had hoped” that Jesus “was” the Messiah (v. 21).
 - a. This “walking apart” from the faith is contrasted with the faith of the women, who reported Jesus’ resurrection.
 - i. Once these disciples are enlightened and forgiven they return immediately to Jerusalem, to the fold.
3. The disciples had thought Jesus a mighty prophet, but did not “see” (have faith) that He was the Messiah. Luke thus develops the theme of how they are led to “see”.
 - a. Note Luke’s irony. The story the disciples relate all confirms the prophecies that Jesus had made in the midst of the disciples (*e.g.* at 9.22; 13.32-33; 18.31-33).
4. Jesus enlightens the disciples by outlining how all of Scripture reflects God’s plan of salvation, which has found its fulfillment in His supreme sacrifice.