

HEARERS OF THE WORD

Acts 3:13-15, 17-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 2:1-5a; Luke 24:35-48

Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself.

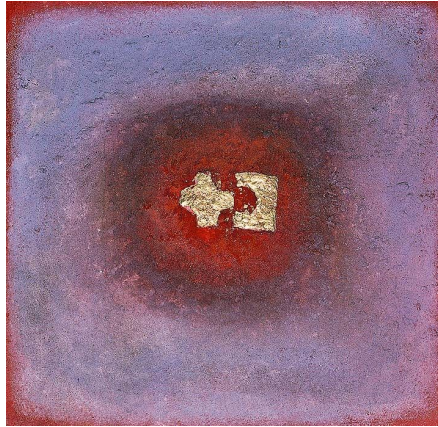
Luke 24:35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Luke 24:36 While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 37 They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. 38 He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate in their presence.

Luke 24:44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46 and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things.

49 *And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.*"

50 *Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; 53 and they were continually in the temple blessing God.*



INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This is the last scene in Luke's Gospel and therefore a very important moment for presenting one more time the themes at the heart of Luke's proclamation. It may be worth repeating again that the "resurrection appearance narratives" are special to each Gospel, reflecting the theology of the writer and the concerns at the time of writing. The first sentence is the end of the Emmaus story and makes an important link with this narrative. The appointed selection ends at v.48, but, to give the full context, the rest of the conclusion is offered as well.

KIND OF WRITING

From a technical point of view, this is a *peroratio*, that is, a conclusion. The functions of the conclusion were named at the time as three: to sum up, to amplify and to engage the emotions. The *summing up* is clear: Jesus the prophetic messiah, who started his ministry in Luke 4:16ff and died as a martyr prophet like Stephen, is presented again in the light of the Old Testament. The *amplification* is focused on the experience the disciples have of the Risen Lord. In the previous story, his presence is highly elusive and in this story, very natural questions of the reality of his risen state are addressed. Finally, if you look back over the text, many words of *emotion* are to be found: peace, startled, terrified, doubt,

Thought for the day

For the word of God to become a living word, we need to listen beyond the words to the one speaking to us through Scripture. It is our faith that God speaks to us as we listen to "the very voice of the pilgrim people God." This does not happen of its own accord; it calls for a listening ear and an open heart.

Prayer

Merciful God, anoint me with you Holy Spirit. As I read your Word, let me hear your voice speaking to me from within. Give me the wisdom to understand your message to me. Let your Word be the joy of my heart and the light to my feet. Give me strength to build my life on your Word. Let it be done to me according to your Word. May I rejoice in the blessedness of hearing your Word and keeping it. Speak Lord; your servant is listening.

joy, repentance, forgiveness. Furthermore, the disciples are now engaged as witnesses to what they have experienced.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

In the Old Testament, the book of Deuteronomy represents the "last will and testament" of Moses. It explores the importance of the figure and offers a synthesis of teaching and a looking forward to the tasks of "the bereaved" after the departure of Moses.

The references within the text to the teaching of the OT take us to several passages which Luke here reminds us of.

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. (Deuteronomy 18:15)

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favour. (Isaiah 61:1-2)

In the Acts of the Apostles—the second volume—Luke will make great use of the Psalms to show the continuity between the religion of Israel and the proclamation of Jesus as messiah.

This symbolic narrative functions as an exploration of Easter faith — how we come to it and how we hold on to it. It is reassuring that the Resurrection Appearance Narratives so often feature *doubt*. It is natural and reassures us that the first believers did not dream it all up. Then you have the *sovereign self-presentation* of the Risen Lord. This cannot be arranged or generated in any way: it is the gift of Jesus. Luke underscores that Jesus is *both* the crucified one and the risen one. Either affirmation on its own would be deficient. Finally, because the God of the covenant was consistently at work through Moses and the prophets, the *continuity with the earlier dispensation* is also underlined.

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

To feel again the force of this scene, the reader would do well to go back to two key stories in this Gospel: the proclamation at Nazareth (4:16-30) and the road to Emmaus (24:13-35). In some ways, this story brings into the present of the hearer the earlier “closed” experiences of the first generation. It functions in a way similar to that importance sentence in John 20: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” (John 20:29)

ST PAUL

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:42-49)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 35 The verse serves to connect the two stories.

Verse 36 The risen Lord can “present” himself in a sovereign way. Peace here has the full meaning of resurrection shalom, freedom from death and the fear of death.

Verse 37 Doubt / non-recognition is a reassuring feature of the appearance narratives.

Verse 38 This is repeated for emphasis and to open up the teaching of Jesus.

Verse 39 This reminds us of the Thomas story in John 20. The task is the same: to teach that the Risen Lord has not left behind his passage through death, but precisely because he is still himself, “bearing the marks of one slain”, he can help us. Cf. Rev 5:6.

Verse 40 The risen one is the crucified and the crucified is the risen one.

Verse 41 Joy is a large theme in Luke; the combination of joy and disbelief is startling but quite realistic.

Verse 42 This again reminds us of John 21 — the Lukan account may be a reception of John 21.

Verse 43 This rather physical account of the risen body is probably offered to counter tendencies, present even in earliest Christianity, not to take the incarnation seriously after and even before the resurrection. The early heresy of docetism held that Jesus merely seemed (*dokeō*) to be human. The physical eating is a symbolic rebuttal of any such tendencies. 1 Cor 15 remains a significant elucidation on the nature of the risen body.

Verse 44 See Luke 4 and Luke 24 above for the references.

Verse 45 This verse reflects the early Christian experience that the Bible of the day (our Old Testament) could be understood only in the light of resurrection faith. The story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 illustrates the task well.

Verse 46 This is a difficult text. Not only is the messiah as future deliverer not mentioned in the OT but also the suffering and rising could hardly be said to be clearly present. The texts in mind are most likely the Suffering Servant songs of Isaiah 40-55, which proved such an important source for understanding the contradiction of the cross.

Verse 47 Repentance and forgiveness are already present at the cross: *Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not*

know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). *And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts.* (Luke 23:48-49)

Jerusalem remains for Luke the locus of salvation history, which spreads out across the Acts from the holy city to the eternal city.

Verse 48 Witness turns out to be a key activity also in the Acts. There are no “free” resurrection appearances: the experience of the Risen Lord always includes a mission and a task.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. When we are not expecting it to happen, even a good event can startle us. So it was with the disciples when Jesus appeared to them. He sought to calm them and helped them to see the good news behind what had initially alarmed them. Who has been a Jesus person for you by helping you to find meaning and good news in life?

2. Jesus helped the disciples to find new hope, but he did not give them easy answers. He asked them to see the facts before their eyes. He wanted them to learn from the experience they were having. As a parent, teacher, friend or guide, have you been a Jesus person to another, helping him/her to find hope and purpose in life by learning from his/her experiences? Who has done this for you?

3. The disciples had a resurrection experience. Unexpected possibilities for the future surfaced when it seemed that hope had gone. What have been your resurrection experiences; recovery of health when it did not seem possible, new opportunities after failure or disappointment, inner healing after a deep hurt, etc?

4. It took the disciples some time to grasp the meaning of what was happening. It can take us time to learn the deeper lessons of life. Reflect on an example of some lesson about life that you have learned slowly over time?

PRAYER

God of all the prophets, you fulfilled your promise of old that your Christ would suffer and so rise to glory.

Open our minds to understand the Scriptures and fill us with joyful wonder in the presence of the Risen Christ, that we may be his witnesses to the farthest ends of the earth. Amen.

Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out

Acts 3:12 *When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?"* 13 The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. 14 But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, 15 and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. 16 *And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.*

Acts 3:17 "And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18 In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. 19 Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, 20 *so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus,* 21 *who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets.*

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Omitted verses are restored here to give the context of the preaching, which is the story of the man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. =

KIND OF WRITING

This is part of a longer speech in two parts, as follows:

vv. 12-16: how the healing happened – on account of Jesus risen.

vv. 17-26: what the healing demands and why – conversion of heart.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

We overhear an early Christian argument, trying to understand the shock of the death of the Messiah in the light of the Old Testament, using especially the Suffering Servant Songs and, as elsewhere, the psalms.

RELATED READINGS

(i) There is a powerful evocation of the revelation to Moses from Exodus 3:6, 15-17.

(ii) The text evokes the Suffering Servant Songs of Second Isaiah: *Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous (= "just") one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.* (Is 53:11)

(iii) Cf. the close of Third Gospel, Luke 24:44-49)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 12 Peter responds to their sense of wonder at the healing by denying it was brought about through the power of the apostles (cf. Acts 14:15; 10:26; Rev 19:10). Elsewhere the apostles resist being treated as the cause of miracles (Acts 8:10).

Verse 13 God's full title indicates it was the same God of the Old Testament who now raised Jesus. The miracle happened through Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. Reference to Is 53:11: servant.

Verse 14 This verse gives a theological reading of the rejection of Jesus, using very high titles for him. Reference to Is 53:11: righteous or just one. "Holy one" can be used of God and of servants of God. The historical reference is to Barabbas (Lk 23:18). In Luke's theological vision, he notices that it was some of the Jewish leadership who condemned Jesus, not all the people (contrast Matthew). At the same time, the death was a response to human sin, which is universal and so we are all involved.

Verse 15 The sharp contrast of life and death here serves to point out that the people of Jerusalem were acting against God and therefore wrongly, in rejecting Jesus. The apostles witness not to their own spiritual experiences but to God's raising of Jesus.

Verse 16 This verse (omitted in the lectionary) then explains how the miracle happened. Faith is given great emphasis, but not the man's faith. Rather, it is the faith of the church as a whole.

Verse 17 In this verse, Peter moves to the consequences for the Jerusalemites. He begins by excusing them: they did not realise what they were doing. However, ignorance is no longer an excuse after the resurrection and in the light of the witness of the apostles themselves.

Verse 18 The Christ event is consistent with God's word in the Bible. It may be awkward to mention but no text of Hebrew Bible actually says this. Luke is working differently, in the light of Christian faith. Because Jesus is the fulfilment of God's Word, all of scripture somehow refers to him.

Verse 19 Repentance and sin are understood together in Sir 17:24-25; 48:15; Wis 5:3.

Verse 20 Refreshment is another term for the restoration of Israel as a whole. There was a Jewish belief that the repentance of Israel would trigger the End (for example, in the *Testament of Daniel* 6:4: *The enemy is eager to trip up all who call on the name of the Lord because he knows that on the day in which Israel trusts, the enemy's kingdom will be brought to an end.*)

Verse 21 The restoration of Israel was at the centre of Jesus' project, and symbolised by the twelve apostles (= sons of Jacob = tribes of Israel).

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Notice that the apostles deflect attention away from themselves. This is not false modesty (or low self-esteem!) but rather just reality, because it is all God's handiwork. Reflect on times in my life when this realisation really struck home.

2. The faith mentioned is the faith of the community ("look not on our sins of on the faith of the church"). We are not alone on the journey, even at the level of conviction. What does my belonging to the faith community meant to me, on the local and universal levels?

3. The journey of conversion (repentance) goes on all through life, triggering change and growth when faith is truly alive. Where am I on my own journey today?

PRAYER

O God, you read our hearts and you know us better than we know ourselves. Draw even more closely to your word and gospel that we may confess your power at work in us and so bear witness to your Messiah, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection

1 John 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 John 2:3 Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. 4 Whoever says, "I have come to know him," but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; 5 but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

It is commonly observed that there are no specific ethical commands in the Johannine school, except the central and most comprehensive of all, to love. In negative mode, sins are not listed but are important and sinning as a verb has a significant place in 1 John. Correspondingly, Jesus is the one who takes away sin and cleanses us. How we are to understand these things today and to talk about them is a great issue.

KIND OF WRITING

Prologue: The Word of Life (1:1-4)

I. God is light (1:5-2:27)

II. God is righteous (2:18-4:6)

III. God is love (4:7-5:12)

Epilogue: Assurances (5:13-21)

Within I., there are three subsections,

i. Denying sin (1:5-2:2)

ii. The new commandment (2:3-11)

iii. Temptations (2:12-27)

ORIGIN OF THE READING

The tremendous insistence on loving in this document makes one suspect that the emphasis was *needed*. Furthermore, some, it would seem, had come to undervalue or even deny the salvation which comes through Jesus' death and resurrection.

RELATED READINGS

But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say

that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1John 1:7-9)

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven on account of his name. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young people, because you have conquered the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young people, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (1John 2:12-14)

Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God. (1John 3:8-9)

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. (John 14:15-17)

But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (1John 1:7)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 1 God's astonishing mercy is not to be abused by presumption. The implication is that we all do sin and that we need God's help to conquer the reality of sin. The word "advocate" is used in the Gospel to speak of the Spirit but also here to speak of Jesus. The root meaning is someone standing alongside you and pleading your case.

Verse 2 Twice the writer uses the expression "atonement" — also in 4:10. It does require careful understanding. The

term does not occur in the Gospel where the death of Jesus is the new disclosure of God's healing love. When we see the expression "atonement" here, there is no need to read into it the full Anselmian understanding in all its dimensions. It is sufficient to acknowledge here that the writer is proclaiming the salvific effect of Jesus' death and resurrection, in language which was already by then traditional (cf. Heb 9:14-15 and perhaps Rom 3:25). Some must have denied this and so the writer affirms it. Even in the Gospel, Jesus is the "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) Bluntly put, something happened for us, explored in the Gospel and in 1 John: Jesus' lifting up effected a reconciliation between God and us, but there is no hint of a price or substitution or punishment in the later traditional sense. In a word, it is not the blood as such but the life of love it represents which cancels our sins.

Verse 3 This is constant in the letter, as may be seen other passages.

Verse 4 Cf. for emphasis some other passages: *If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us.* (1John 1:10) *Who is the liar but the person who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This one is the antichrist: the person who denies the Father and the Son.* (1John 2:22)

Verse 5 *And now, little children, remain in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink away from him in shame when he comes back. If you know that he is righteous, you also know that everyone who practices righteousness has been fathered by him.* (1John 2:28-29)

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. To a greater or lesser degree, nobody escapes sinning. This does raise the question, how do I receive and live forgiveness?

2. Consistency of life and conviction is the desire of us all. Otherwise, we live a life of radical *disintegration*, often descending into contradiction and even hypocrisy. With all our ideals, it is a risk.

PRAYER

We praise you, God, for the gift of new life, forgiveness and love in Jesus' death and resurrection. May your love take hold of us and may we embrace it so that all we have and are will be shaped by living our faith in love. In this way, may we be perfect as you our heavenly father are perfect. Amen.

THE LITURGY

Acts 3:13-15, 17-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 2:1-5a; Luke 24:35-48

THE THREE READINGS

The proclamation of the risen Lord is found clearly in both readings. In the first reading, it appears in the course of a speech which in the Gospel, we are offered a symbolic narrative. Both readings—from very different worlds—proclaim our reconciliation in Christ through his death and resurrection.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

The Psalm seems to respond to two elements in the first reading, namely, the response of God to the killing of Jesus (“from anguish you released me”) and the consequent invitation to convert (“Repent therefore, and turn to God”). The exultant tone of Easter finds expression in the response, *Lift up the light of your face on us, O Lord.*

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First Reading

Acts 3:13-15, 17-19

What difference does believing in the resurrection mean? Peter expounds Christian faith with an eye to the consequence.

Second Reading

1 John 2:1-5

As we hear this passage, it may help to remember that there is only one commandment in the Gospels and letters of John: to love! We are commanded to “do” what we most need and want.

Gospel

Luke 24:35-48

The gospel today invites us to acknowledge our own experience of faith and to become bearers of the good news in our time. The last line of the Gospel (v. 48) puts it up to us all.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 19 April

Acts 6:8-15

Stephen, whose feast we celebrate on 26 December, was one of the seven chosen to relieve the pressure on the apostles

(Acts 6:5). Today we begin his story, a story of extraordinary witness leading to martyrdom. The Greek for a “witness” is *martyrs*, from which our word martyr.

John 6:22-29

The focus throughout John 6 is really on the *person* of Jesus. This is very evident in today’s Gospel: ‘This is working for God: you must believe in the one he has sent.’

Tuesday 20 April

Acts 7:51-8:1

As we listen to the story of Stephen’s death, we might notice echoes of the story of Jesus’ crucifixion peculiar to Luke’s Gospel. This is intentional, because Luke sees Jesus’ death as also that of a prophet-martyr.

John 6:30-35

Appetites, such as hunger and thirst, are often used metaphorically to speak of hungers of the heart. Today, Jesus satisfies our hunger because he is our bread of life.

Wednesday 21 April

St Anselm of Canterbury, bishop

Acts 8:1-8

Three important characters overlap in today’s narrative: Stephen, Paul and Philip. We will hear much of Paul later; for the moment the story of Philip is taken up. He was also one of the seven chosen in Acts 6:5. Is this the same Philip who was an apostle? This is not so clear, although early tradition affirms it is one and the same person.

John 6:35-40

Our Gospel today is rich in invitation. The words of Pope Francis come to mind: *Let the risen Jesus enter your life, welcome him as a friend, with trust: he is life! If up till now you have kept him at a distance, step forward. He will receive you with open arms. If you have been indifferent, take a risk: you won’t be disappointed.*

Thursday 22 April

Acts 8:26-40

Today we hear a memorable anecdote involving an exotic figure, the finance minister of the “Candace” or queen of Ethiopia. There are considerable links

with the Emmaus story: the unrecognised “guest”, the explanation of the Scriptures, the sudden disappearance and displacement. Luke wants us to “hear” these stories together.

John 6:44-51

The sermon on the bread of life continues. You may notice references to the incarnation, the cross and the resurrection. In this Gospel — which has no Lord’s Supper — Jesus “gives” his body and blood on the cross.

Friday 23 April

St George, martyr

Acts 9:1-20

The story of Saul / Paul begins today, a story which will occupy the rest of the Acts. The conversion of Paul was a key event for early Christianity, placing at the service of The Way a remarkable person of faith, intelligence and energy.

John 6:52-59

The “giving of my flesh” takes place in this Gospel at the crucifixion. Eating and drinking are metaphors for faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection, celebrated sacramentally in the Eucharist.

Saturday 24 April

Saint Fidelis of Sigmaringen, priest, martyr

Acts 9:31-42

The story we are about to hear has a double resonance. It resembles the story of Jairus’ daughter in Luke 8, which in turn resembles the story of Elijah and the widow’s son in 1 Kings 17. Luke’s message is clear: great prophetic and life-giving actions continue among the followers of The Way.

John 6:60-69

There are several things “going on” in this reading. The departure of some mostly likely refers to a split in the community when some walked away (not unknown today, alas). The close of John 6 is a Johannine version of the scene in Caesarea Philippi—*who do you say I am?* The wording is very different, but Peter is the spokesman and this affirmation of faith is one of the strongest in this Gospel.