

**Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People**  
Second Sunday of Easter – Year C

**RCL Readings** – Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 150; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31

**ACNA Readings** – Acts 5:12a, 17-22, 25-29; Psalm 111; Revelation 1:1-19; John 20:19-31

**Introduction.** Easter is more than a day; it is a season. The season of Easter is known as Eastertide. Eastertide is 50 days in length. It follows the pattern of the Jewish calendar with 50 days between Passover and *Shavuot* or Pentecost. This season's traditional greetings and responses of 'He is risen!' and 'He is risen indeed!' can bring hope and light to our broken world. As a very smart man, Jaroslav Pelikan, once said, 'If Christ is risen, nothing else matters, and if Christ is not risen, then nothing else matters'.

**Common Theme.** What could possibly be the appropriate response to the risen Messiah? Worship! And this is one of the themes of the readings this week. Many of the readings invite us to give thanks and praise in responding to the good things God has done and to the soon return of Jesus.

**Acts 5:12a, 17-22, 25-32.** In the book of Acts, we see the Temple feature prominently as a place of worship and witness. The temple was not something shunned by the early believers post-resurrection. The growing number of believers of the Jesus movement met together in the only area of Jerusalem large enough to contain them, Solomon's Colonnade. This was a large area of the temple designed and constructed by King Herod. The new believers did not hide from the authorities. Instead, they would meet in the very public temple area to learn together, worship together, and witness together of the signs and wonders done amongst them. With them being so open, it was quite easy for the temple leadership to send their guards and arrest them. Prison is not a place where the apostles remain long. The angelic rescuer tells the apostles to return to public ministry back in the temple. The truth of the resurrection is not something we should endeavour to hide. The resurrection life is something we should share and proclaim.

After the resurrection and following Pentecost, the disciples continue to preach the good news of the risen Messiah. Once again they are brought before the Temple leadership, the Sanhedrin, previously having escaped prison by angelic help. The accusation by the high priest is a remarkable testimony to the effectiveness of the Gospel. The message of the disciples had 'filled Jerusalem'. In reply to this charge, Peter does not seek to offer any defence. Peter's response is not a plea for mercy from the Sadducees. Rather he simply states the truth: 'we must obey God rather than men'. This is not a call for social disobedience. The call of the Lord is a call of worship, witness, and forgiveness. Peter reiterates the Gospel in one sentence: the God of our fathers raised Jesus! The next statement – that the Sadducees killed Jesus – has sometimes been used throughout history to charge the Jewish people with deicide and fuel antisemitism. Peter's statement does not hide man's guilt, but it is also not an accusation of hate. We should remind ourselves that the Early Church wrote the Creeds in which we declare that 'Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate', not Israel! The resurrection is good news of repentance and forgiveness, not judgment and condemnation.

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**Psalm 150.** The last psalm of the book of Psalms is a short, eloquent call to worship the Lord. Psalm 150 also concludes the five ‘Hallelujah Psalms’, Psalms 146-150, which all begin and end with the call to praise. There is no crisis or enemy on the mind of the psalmist. There is no appeal for mercy or deliverance but simply the exhortation to praise God. The most fitting place to worship God was in his sanctuary, be that the tabernacle at Shiloh or the temple in Jerusalem. However, of course, the temple was not the only place to praise God. The Jewish people in the diaspora had no access to the temple and still continued to meet together in synagogues to read the Word and offer praise. In a similar vein, our worship of the Lord is not restricted to church on Sundays. Our service and worship of God continue as we leave the church building to love and witness in the world where we are. ‘Let everything that has breath praise the Lord’ is a beautiful conclusion to the book of Psalms and the call to worship. The Hebrew word *neshama*, used in verse 6, denotes all living creatures, both humans and animals. Everything that breathes should give worship to the One who gave it breath. Every breath we take is a gift from God. It’s not a right nor something we are owed by God; it is a gift. Revelation 5:13 describes a future in which this call to praise from every creature in heaven and earth comes to pass. The future of creation is one of worship!

**Revelation 1:1-19.** The Greek word *apokalupsis* means *unveiling* or *revealing*. Jesus is the one unveiling the future to John as well as being the object that is being revealed. The heavenly reality that is being revealed takes us through the mysterious antichrist, Babylon, the Beast and total universal calamity and destruction. Yet throughout the text and in its final consummation, where heaven and earth meet in the new Jerusalem, there is worship. The text tells us of the blessings we have in reading and taking to heart the call to worship. The idea of the Greek phrase *en tachei* (ἐν τάχει), which is often translated as *shortly* or *soon to take place*, is more than the event occurring soon but that when it actually does take place it will be sudden, short and swift. John’s vision on the isle of Patmos draws on images found in the Hebrew Bible, in the books of Daniel, Ezekiel and Isaiah. Patmos was apparently a prison island for the Roman Empire. It was an island rich in marble, and many prisoners worked those mines as part of their punishment. John uses the phrase, the ‘son of man’, which is the eschatological figure seen in Daniel 7 and the most often used self-designation of Jesus. Now in verse 17, Jesus calls himself the First and the Last. This title comes from the vision of Isaiah 48:12-16 in which the prophet sees someone called the First and the Last who exists before time and establishes the foundations of creation and is subsequently sent by God himself along with His Spirit. Jesus reveals himself to be that person.

The Revelation of Jesus the Messiah to John (a.k.a the Apocalypse of John) is not a book you read to know the exact date of the end times. It does not reveal who the antichrist is, and it won’t reveal what exactly is the mark of the beast. First and foremost, it is a book about worship. Everyone is worshipping the Lord throughout the revelation to John. Angels worship; the elders around the throne worship; all nations of every tribe and tongue worship the King and the Lamb. Some passages from Revelation are so powerful in their phraseology of worship that they are included in most liturgies of our churches (e.g.

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Rev 5:12-13). Revelation encourages us to have an eternal perspective of the world, to have hope in our present sufferings, and invites us to worship with the hosts of heaven. John writes his apocalypse to the churches of Asia Minor. To five of the seven churches there is a call to repentance. Jesus was faithful to his calling unto death. God was faithful to raise him as firstborn from the dead. He is now ruler over all the kings of the earth, and he is coming again. When he comes, our worship and adoration will continue with the saints past, present and future.

**John 20:19-31.** The Gospel opens sometime on Sunday night with the disciples in fear and behind locked doors. The text says they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, but in all honesty this is an unfounded fear as there is no indication in any of the gospels of the Jewish leadership coming after the disciples of Jesus. Fear is the biggest enemy of the Gospel. Fear so often prevents us from speaking the truth, standing our ground, helping others in need and much more. Sometimes those fears are well founded, but many times they are not.

Jesus appears suddenly among them and says the word ‘peace’. This is rooted in the Hebrew word and expression *shalom* שְׁלוֹם. Literally speaking, the word *shalom* does indeed mean *peace*, but according to its Hebraic context also means so much more. *Shalom* comes from the verb ‘to pay’. The word שְׁלַם *shalem*, from the same root, means *paid* in the masculine singular past tense. *Shalem* also means *whole*. So when I go to the market in Jerusalem and want a whole roast chicken, I use the word שְׁלַם. That means the whole thing including the neck (and even some of the feathers still attached 😊). Before Jesus was in that room with his disciples, they were scared, nervous, uncertain of current events and unsure of the future. Then he appears. It’s a miracle, the resurrection is true and certain. In that context Jesus proclaims שְׁלוֹם *Peace!* How did he bring peace? By paying the price for peace, and he paid it in full, the whole amount. All of that wrapped up in one word, *shalom* שְׁלוֹם.

Jesus then sends the apostles out, and us by extension, with that message of peace. The apostles do not depart alone; they are given the Holy Spirit. Note that the disciple have the received the Holy Spirit before Jesus tells them to wait in Jerusalem to be baptized in the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:5. In its Jewish context, having the Holy Spirit and being baptized in the Holy Spirit are two different things. Part of the commission by Jesus here in John 20 is the power and authority of forgiveness. It is a basic Christian doctrine that salvation is in no other name but that of Jesus. His sacrifice is the blood of the New Covenant for the forgiveness of sins proven to be true by the resurrection. Forgiveness also has a communal, reciprocal and conditional aspect, as Jesus taught us to pray; forgive us our sins as we forgive others. Forgiveness, through the resurrection of the Messiah, is proclaimed by the followers of Jesus boldly and without fear. Scattered throughout the New Testament are images of us being ambassadors and representatives of Jesus. While his physical body is no longer on earth, he is with us in and through the body of Messiah, the Church. His forgiveness is still proclaimed and made available through his followers. This is an amazing responsibility we bear and a role we should never take lightly.

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Lastly, we have the encounter with Thomas, who reminds us that the sceptic is never rejected by God but rather God continues to willingly reveal himself to those who doubt. This leads to Thomas's confession that Jesus is 'Lord and God' and is one of the clearer references to the deity of Christ in the Bible. This statement is also an act of worship. We are encouraged to believe the disciples' report of the resurrection and true accounts of the Gospels. So we declare in our worship that Jesus is both Lord and God.

**ACNA Reading**

**Psalm 111.** This is another of the acrostic psalms, that is every sentence is cleverly arranged according to the Hebrew alphabet. Each of the 22 lines (not verses) begins with the successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, except the opening line which is 'Hallelujah, praise the Lord!' Again this is a psalm of worship. Biblically everything begins in the heart. We are instructed to love God with our whole heart. We use the words of David in beseeching God to create in us clean hearts during confession. The prophets declare that God will remove hearts of stone and replace them with hearts of flesh. And here in the first verse, we are told that worship begins in the heart. Worship begins on a personal individual level which we then take into the community and congregation. If we want others to worship the Lord, then we should set the example by worshipping first. The psalm gives us a simple reason why we should praise God: He has done great things! And the greatest has been the resurrection of Jesus and the defeat of death and the Enemy.

**About the author.** The Rev. Aaron Eime is a deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and a teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master's program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and Hebrew. He has taught internationally, including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.