



20 February – 26 February 2022

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

While it may not seem like it, the theme running through the Lectionary this week could be viewed as 'resurrection living.' The Corinthians reading actually speaks of resurrection, while the others speak of living in ways that bring life both to others and to ourselves without using the word 'resurrection'. The Gospel reading from Luke speaks of loving enemies, giving generously, lending without asking for repayment, and refusing to judge others. These are all ways of living that bring life to others, and that also set us free from the forces of death, and bring us a deeper, more vibrant life. The Old Testament reading, in which Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and forgives them, is a wonderful illustration of Jesus' teaching – freedom from vengeance and bitterness for Joseph, and new life for his brothers.

We so often think of resurrection either as an event that happened long ago or one that is yet to happen at the end of time. But whether we project resurrection into the past or the future, we seldom consider it as a lived reality now. We do not have to wait for some future judgement to experience resurrection. God offers us life, renewal, recreation, restoration, and liberation right here and right now. Whenever we embrace the values and priorities of God's Reign, and seek to bring life to those around us, we are living the reality called resurrection, because when we do that, the forces of death are conquered and life triumphs.

This week we are invited to enter into a deeper experience of resurrection right now.

SUNDAY 20 FEBRUARY 2022

Read: Luke 6:27-38

Reflect: At the centre of Jesus' teaching in today's reading is what has become known as the 'golden rule' – treat others the way you want to be treated. But actually, Jesus invites us to go even further than that. Rather than following the practice of the society around us, which is to love and serve those who offer love and service back to us, Jesus calls us to love our enemies, and do good to those who treat us badly. Treating others well is not dependent on them treating us as we want to be treated. It is about treating people well regardless of how they treat us. This may seem naïve and impractical in our world, but if we desire to break cycles of hatred, division, violence, and retribution, we can choose no other way.

Jesus did not ask for us to live differently from how he lived. He didn't just teach this way of living, he put it into practice for himself. It did not mean that he did not confront evil when he encountered it. Love meant being willing to challenge corruption, injustice, and violence. But it also means that the door is always open for reconciliation, and forgiveness is always offered, even when it seems foolish.

How can you live more deeply into this resurrection-bringing life that Jesus calls us to today?

Do: One of the most helpful and transforming spiritual practices is to read the Scriptures prayerfully and reflectively, reading not for content, but to hear the whisper of the Spirit deep in our hearts. Use today's reading, going through it as many times as you can, as the basis for this prayerful practice of Scripture reading.

Pray: Teach me to live your resurrection life in my own life today, O God.

MONDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2022

Read: Genesis 33:1-17

Reflect: Today's reading is enigmatic. On the one hand, Jacob experiences a resurrection of sorts as he finally reunites with Esau after many years. When they departed Esau was angry at Jacob and wanted him dead. Naturally Jacob was afraid to meet him again.

Esau, however, is forgiving, welcoming and friendly. He welcomes Jacob home, and even tries to refuse his gift. Then he invites Jacob back to Seir, which may have been Esau's home, since this was the traditional name for the land of Esau's descendants. Jacob promises to meet Esau there, but true to form, he breaks his promise and travels to a different place. We are never told how Esau responded when Jacob didn't appear, and we are never given a reason for Jacob's breach of promise.

It seems strange that, after experiencing this reconciliation with his brother, and the new life and safety he enjoyed as a result, Jacob would do this strange thing. He could have gone to Succoth later after spending some time strengthening the new relationship he now had with his brother. But, for whatever reason, he chose not to, and lost the chance of a new, life-giving relationship with his estranged brother. Sometimes, when we experience an unexpected 'resurrection,' the experience is powerful enough to change us radically. But sometimes, the resurrection is a gift, but we remain essentially the same. Our experience of life does not change how we live. This is unfortunate and robs us of potentially life-giving opportunities.

What gifts of resurrection have you received recently? How can you allow those experiences to lead you into a deeper relationships and a more Christlike life?

Do: When resurrection comes calling it can heal us and affirm us, but it can also challenge us and confront us with the places in our lives where we embrace death rather than life. When the latter happens, the best response is confession and repentance. When we admit that we have not been living in alignment with God's life, and when we commit to choosing a different way going forward, we open ourselves to further resurrection. Today, try and find the courage to spend time in honest confession and repentance.

Pray: When your life floods into my life, O God, teach me to receive it and allow it to change me to be more like you.

TUESDAY 22 FEBRUARY 2022

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:17-22, 27-33

Reflect: The Corinthian Church was a community built on the Gospel of Christ. They had been called to live this new resurrection life that was available to them in Jesus. Like all churches, they were struggling. They had different ideas of how this life should be lived, and they struggled with who to follow as an authority, an apostle, for their community.

However, regardless of how faithful and committed they were, these Corinthian believers still struggled with the same issues we do today. There were wealthy believers who were clearly insensitive to their poorer sisters and brothers, and some indulged themselves to an excessive degree at the expense of others. This all happened around the Communion Table, where all those who shared in the meal were meant to be welcomed and treated equally. Paul was clearly offended by this. For Paul, living the resurrection life of Jesus meant being committed to bring life to others through treating all people with equal dignity, respect, generosity, kindness and consideration. We may be tempted to think of faith and love in terms of grand gestures, but it is often the small acts of seeing and appreciating other people, and of welcoming and caring for them, that make the greatest impact, and bring the most life.

Who needs you to treat them with kindness, dignity, and respect today?

Do: Prayer is not just something we do with words uttered out of our mouths or considered in our minds. Prayer is also about action, about how we live. When we say prayers for others, but treat them badly, our prayers mean nothing. But, even if we never speak a word of prayer, when we treat others with dignity and respect, our whole lives become a prayer. Today, try praying for others through loving actions, rather than through words.

Pray: Teach me to pray, Jesus, not just in words, but in loving, respectful actions.

WEDNESDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2022

Read: Luke 17:1-4

Reflect: Today's reading may seem to contradict itself. On the one hand Jesus speaks of throwing those who tempt others into the sea with millstones around their necks! Then he teaches that we need to forgive someone who wrongs us no matter how many times they hurt us. How can both teachings be true at the same time?

In the first instance Jesus is speaking of the need for us to confront injustice and protect the 'little ones' – the vulnerable and marginalised people who are hurt by injustice. It is not that Jesus actually wants us to execute corrupt people by throwing them in the sea. He is simply warning us that acting in ways that bring harm to the most vulnerable among us will have consequences and will set us against God and God's purposes in the world.

In the second instance Jesus teaches that God's justice is never about restitution, but always about restoration. This is an important value in God's kingdom. God's justice is not about balancing scales or punishing offenders. It is about seeking the opportunity to let God's resurrection life bring healing and transformation in people and situations where brokenness and death have prevailed. Forgiveness does not 'let offenders off the hook.' God's resurrection life confronts evil, but also leaves the door open for restoration.

How can you stand against injustice while simultaneously offering restoration in your corner of the world today?

Do: Confronting evil and standing against all that brings death has always been part of our calling as followers of Jesus. We can do this in our world by challenging the corrupt and unjust people around us, by signing petitions, and by marching in protest. But just as important – perhaps more so – is the practice of doing good in opposition to injustice. As Richard Rohr says, "The best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better." Today, seek every opportunity to act justly, mercifully, and graciously.

Pray: As you have forgiven me, O God, teach me to love and forgive even those I need to confront.

THURSDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2022

Read: Deuteronomy 9:1-5

Reflect: This Sunday is the last of the season after the Epiphany, and, as always, we will read the story of Jesus' transfiguration – a profound moment in which God's glory shone through this very human man. It may seem strange, then, to be reading about the conquest of Canaan – especially when it appears that God allowed violence and bloodshed because of the "wickedness" of those who lived there. Passages like this have often been used to justify military conflicts, occupations, and invasions, and so we need to read carefully. Remember that this passage reflects a primitive understanding of God. But, remember also that, in this era, material blessing and military success were interpreted as God's blessing. This means that both Moses and the writer who recorded his words were ahead of their times.

Moses strongly warned the people not to think of themselves as better than those they were to fight. God was not rewarding them for some goodness or integrity they may have claimed to have – they were not actually good at all. But, from their understanding as a nation who had been called to be faithful to God, and to be a blessing to the world, it was important that they stayed pure, and so the idolatrous religion of the land, and the people who practiced it, had to be destroyed. This would prove that God was supreme, and would remove any temptations the people might face.

Today we would understand God's call very differently, but the basic principle remains the same. God comes to us, loves us, and is revealed in us not because we are good, but because God is good. And, like Israel was called to, and like Jesus actually did, we are to reveal God's goodness and grace (God's glory) to the world. What a privilege to be called to follow and know such a good God!

Do: As followers of Christ one of the most important words in our vocabulary is "grace". This word means, essentially, that everything is a gift. Whatever joy, wealth, love, and peace we experience is not because we deserve it, or have earned it. It is because we live in a universe that is benevolent, and in which goodness can be experienced by those who don't deserve it. May this truth lead us to make today a day of thanksgiving.

Pray: For your goodness, and the goodness in my life that I enjoy but do not deserve, I thank you, O God.

FRIDAY 25 FEBRUARY 2022

Read: Acts 10:1-8

Reflect: The story of how the Gospel spread to the Gentile community begins with one man: Cornelius. He was a Roman officer, but also a devout and generous believer in God. In a vision he received the instruction to invite Peter to his home, which he obeyed. Meanwhile God was also giving Peter a vision which ensured that, when the invitation came, he was ready and willing to spend time in the home of a Gentile. What makes this whole story so important is that, at every step, it is God who takes the initiative. God sends the visions and prepares the hearts of those involved. And, at the end of the story, it is God who dramatically encounters the people who gather in Cornelius' house. While Peter is still speaking, God's Spirit falls on the Gentile worshippers. It's like God can't even wait for Peter to finish before revealing God's Self.

Sometimes we make it seem like God is hard to find, and exclusive. We may be tempted to frame our faith as if God is our property, and no one else has access. But this passage shows the opposite. God's glory, goodness and grace, are always being revealed to all people. Encounters with God are often surprising and happen in the midst of our daily routines. But sometimes we are so self-absorbed, or so consumed by worry, ambition or lethargy that we wouldn't recognise God's revelation if it hit us in the face.

How can you create space in your life for God's revelation? And how can you help those around you to recognise God's self-disclosure?

Do: The Jewish practice of Sabbath was about maintaining the health of bodies and souls by slowing down for one day a week. This helped to keep God's people more mindful and open to moments of God's self-disclosure. Today try to create small "Sabbath-moments" to help you open your heart to God.

Pray: I open my heart to any ways you may reveal yourself to me today, O God.

SATURDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2022

Read: Psalm 99

Reflect: Psalm 99 is the last of the "enthronement Psalms" in the fourth book of the Psalter. These songs reminded the people, who had endured the failure of their human kings and leaders, that their ultimate king was God. The images here reveal God's glory and majesty. The "cherubim" between which God was enthroned were angelic creatures carved on to the Ark of the Covenant (believed to be God's throne on earth). These strange beings were usually described as having human faces, the wings of eagles, and the bodies and legs of either lions or oxen. They were the defenders of God's throne and were awesome to see (as some prophets did in their visions). So, this whole Psalm offers a picture of a God who is glorious, exalted over all creation, and majestic.

There is an interesting additional thread running through this vision. Notice how often God is depicted as revealing God's Self to people. God's justice and righteousness toward Israel are celebrated. God's answers to prayer, God's forgiveness of wrongdoing, and the way God spoke through priests and prophets are all proclaimed. This glorious God clearly wants relationship with human beings, and God is always reaching out to us. This is part of the meaning of tomorrow's Transfiguration celebration as well.

How is God reaching out to you today? How will you respond?

Do: Like this Psalmist, one the best ways to recognise God's presence and activity in our lives is through the practice of praise. Praise is also a great way to respond to God's self-giving. Make today a day of constant praise.

Pray: For your awesome glory, and your presence in my life, O God, I praise you.