

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Second Sunday of Easter (C)

Acts 5.27-32

Psalm 118.14-29

Revelation 1.4-8

John 20.19-31

Acts 5.27-32

1. This account of the preaching of the Gospel in Jerusalem is intended by Luke to be read in parallel with the account of the preaching of Peter and John found at Acts 4.1-22.
 - a. Now the embattled preachers are all the apostles, not just Peter and John.
 - b. The preaching of the Gospel grows in strength under God's direct control.
 - c. With this growth in the preaching of the Gospel comes growth in the strength of the opposition to it.
2. The Temple authorities have to find out that the apostles are still preaching. They are informed of this preaching by "someone" (v.25).
3. The authorities state "... you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching ..." (v. 28). Luke makes Jerusalem central in his account of the spread of the Gospel. (Cf. Acts 1.4.) This emphasizes the continuity between the Church and Israel, a major Lucan theme.
 - a. Peter's rejoinder, "We must obey God ..." thus amplifies this theme of Acts.

Psalm 118.14-29

1. 118: An individual song of thanksgiving. The presence of first person plural verbs and pronouns (vv. 23-24, 26-27) is therefore a "democratization" in which the people speak with the king.
 - a. Vv. 1 and 29 form an *inclusio* (bookends) which sets the overall theme for the psalm.
 - b. The "gates of righteousness" (v. 19) may have been the actual name for the entrance to the Temple. The king, victorious in battle by the Lord, comes to offer thanks.
 - c. V. 22 is prominent in early Christian understanding of the rejection of Jesus as Messiah by His own people. (Cf. Mtt. 21.42; Acts 4.11; 1 Cor. 3.11; Eph. 2.20; 1 Pet. 2.7-8).

Revelation 1.4-8

1. The genre of apocalyptic literature (visions of the end of the world) dominates in times of persecution (*e.g.*, after the revolt of the Maccabees, and in Revelation, during the persecution under Domitian).
 - a. Apocalyptic is *not* intended as literal prophecy. It is divine "drama," intended to teach and reveal.
 - b. Whereas the Gospels are realistically narrative, and the epistles are basically expository and hortatory, Revelation is unique.
 - i. Revelation is unique in the New Testament, but the genre of apocalyptic is otherwise known (*e.g.*, in Daniel and Ezekiel).

- ii. Revelation is also unique in the New Testament in that it is self-described as prophecy (v. 3).
 - 1. Revelation does, however, contain elements found elsewhere in the New Testament. For example, this reading begins in an epistolary form, addressed to certain churches.
- 2. In v. 1, the book is described as the “revelation of Jesus Christ”. The verb form here in Greek is ambiguous, and may refer either to a revelation *by* Christ or *about* Christ.
 - a. The book then opens with a beatitude to the one who reads it.
- 3. The seven spirits who are before the throne (v. 4) are thought of as seven angels of highest rank (*cf.* Tobit 12.15, in the Apocrypha, and *1 Enoch* 90.21 [a deuterocanonical work, *i.e.*, not part of the Bible]).
 - a. Vv. 7-8 echo the apocalyptic vision recorded at Daniel 7.13 (adapted at Zech. 12.10). *Cf.* Matt. 24.30.
 - b. The identification of “Alpha and Omega” is one of two instances in Rev. in which God Himself is identified as the speaker (*cf.* 21.5-8).
- 4. The seven churches identified in Asia Minor were all in sequence along a common road.
 - a. This revelation is thus a sort of circular letter, to be circulated amongst these churches.

John 20.19-31

- 1. All four Gospel accounts of the resurrection report of the women finding the tomb empty.
 - a. John corroborates many of the details contained in the other Gospel accounts:
 - i. The tomb is found empty.
 - ii. The emptiness of the tomb is confirmed by Peter.
 - iii. Jesus appears, risen, to His disciples.
- 2. The appearance of Jesus to the disciples here follows His appearance to Mary Magdalene in the garden.
 - a. The promises of Jesus’ return are fulfilled in the “hour” of His exaltation/glorification (*cf.* Luke 24.36-43, 47-48).
 - b. The disciples’ joy fulfills the promises of renewed joy.
 - c. He shows the disciples His hands and side to confirm that He is the risen One.
 - i. The resurrection is of the *body*; Jesus was not, as a man, a mere appearance, and as the risen One, He is not a mere appearance.
 - ii. This passage specifically refutes the heresy of “Docetism” (the word is derived from the Greek verb *dokein*, “to appear, or seem”), which argued that Jesus was spirit only and not flesh.
- 3. “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20.22): Earlier in John, the Spirit is characterized as divine indwelling (14.17), which flows from the exalted Jesus as a source of eternal life (7.39).
 - a. The word for spirit, *pneuma*, is the same as that for breath or wind.
 - b. In Luke, the Spirit is received at Pentecost (Acts 2), commissioning the disciples as witnesses.

4. The power of forgiveness here described is not limited to the named disciples, since John refers to the disciples in general.
 - a. The power is granted to the believing community as a whole. This power is the bestowing of forgiveness on those who believe as a result of the witness of the believing community.
5. Thomas confession of the Lord reflect the “highest” Christology found in the Gospels. Elsewhere, Jesus is referred to by titles which include “Lord,” “Son of Man,” “Judge,” “Teacher or Master,” even “Son [of the Father],” and is equated with the Father as “one,” but Thomas here makes a very explicit statement: “My Lord and my God!”
6. Again, Jesus’ physical reality, the reality of His risen body, is emphasized.
 - a. Jesus concludes this encounter with a blessing (v. 31): Those Christians who believe without having seen have the same faith as those disciples who saw.
 - i. Their faith is grounded in the Lord through the presence of the Holy Spirit.