

Weekly Reading – Monday, March 29, 2010

For Easter there are several choices/ options among the texts. I will be using Acts 10 for the first lesson, I Corinthians 15 for the second, and Luke 24 for the third.

Acts 10: 34 - 43

Sometimes we imagine that the outreach to the Gentiles was all Paul. But that's not the case as Acts here demonstrates. In fact, it is Peter who crosses the line first. This text, which is a kind of precis of the resurrection faith, is a speech Peter gives in the home of Cornelius as the figurative scales fall from his eyes and he says that "God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." (NIV) One theme of this text is suggested by the famous quote of Pilgrim leader John Robinson, "There is yet more truth and light to break forth from God's holy Word," or the UCC update, "God is still speaking." What God is doing in the present, crossing cultural/ ethnic/ national barriers that were lines of suspicion and ill will is a continuation of what God has done in the past in Jesus, including raising Jesus from the dead. Moreover, it is the leader of the Jesus Movement, not just outsiders or others, who has his eyes and heart opened. Note that throughout this text, God is the subject of the verbs and prime actor. The world, human beings and Peter are the recipients. Easter proclaims the surprising, unexpected, intrusions of God which makes this a great Easter text.

I Corinthians 15: 19 - 26

Broadly speaking, liberals make a mistake in rejecting the idea that the resurrection of Christ has implications for our own death and mortality, while conservatives err in thinking that this is its only meaning. Paul operates from a different assumption, seeing death less as a "natural part of life" than as a power or dominion (vs. 24 - 25) which, along with the dominion of Sin, rules a fallen world. Christ and his resurrection disarm these twin powers allowing us to live lives that with Paul declare, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (15: 55). The "death" of which Paul speaks and which he says "came through a man," (Adam) is more than physical death, it is the death of meaning, connection. Death, in this sense, is the endpoint of Sin's power, complete estrangement from, separation from, God.

Luke 24: 1 - 12

This is the first of Luke's resurrection or Easter narratives. It will, in some traditions, be the text for the Easter Vigil service on Saturday night. As the whole chapter, Luke 24, unfolds the stories move from empty tomb, what we have here, to appearances of the risen Christ, beginning with the stranger on the Emmaus road, then an appearance to all the disciples. While each of the gospel writers relates and shapes the story differently, there are some common elements. The starting point is an empty tomb. Second, It is some women followers who go to the tomb and are the

first messengers. Third, their message is not believed or perhaps grasped. Here Luke reports that the disciples thought it "an idle tale." But still it prompts Peter to go and have a look, but that look is for Peter inconclusive. He leaves "wondering what had happened." One of the common threads is that all the people involved are those who have had a relationship with Jesus and were in some way his followers. The risen Christ doesn't pop out to Pilate or haunt Herod, nor suddenly appear on a mountain top, aglow for a city below. It is his followers who see him, who are given power by his living presence, whose lives are transformed. A particular Lucan element is the two men in the tomb, in shining white. This recalls Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration, but they are not identified as such. The two will reappear in the Acts story of the Ascension (Acts 1). God is up to something. Some of us come to faith quickly, some slowly. Some of us need a word, some a presence, some a sign (bread broken). Some doubt, some believe. All are, in the end, overwhelmed by joy.