

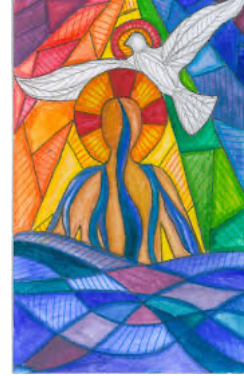
March 23, 2021

Lectionary Passages:

Psalm 119:9-16

Isaiah 44:1-8

Acts 2:14-24



Selected Verses:

Blessed are you, O Lord;
teach me your statutes.
With my lips I declare
all the ordinances of your mouth. – Psalm 119: 12-13

Do not fear, or be afraid;
have I not told you from of old and declared it?
You are my witnesses!
Is there any god besides me?
There is no other rock; I know not one. – Isaiah 44:8

Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. –Acts 2: 22-24

Devotional:

On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), Peter addresses the crowd. Peter, the one who had denied Jesus on the day of Passover now proclaims Jesus risen from the death. Over the course of the fifty days, Peter along with all the disciples had changed. Part of that is noted by it being the eleven. It isn't the number of the tribes of Israel. Maybe that is because the priestly tribe of Levi is no longer needed since Jesus is the High Priest.

As Peter addresses the crowd on Pentecost, he is fulfilling the prophet Isaiah. There, we are told not to be afraid, instead we are to be witnesses for the work God has done. If God is our rock, if God is our stronghold, we have nothing to fear. God is with us and will give us the words to say and the strength to say them. The purpose of the church is always to be witnessing what God has done in Jesus Christ.

As Peter begins the Pentecost speech, he quotes the Joel: "In the last days, I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh." God's Spirit has been poured out. We now live in the last days. These are the days of the new covenant, when God's Spirit is in all believers. As the old covenant focused on the law, the new covenant focuses on God's law written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. We no longer need to be afraid. God is with us.

The witness of Peter is on Jesus Christ, who had died for the sins of the world and who God had raised up from death. Often, when asked to witness the message of Jesus Christ, we give a testimony. We speak about what God has done in our lives. We talk about how we have changed. We turn to focus away from God and put it on ourselves. Using Peter as an example, we should start with the focus on Jesus Christ.

Peter does this first by quoting the Old Testament, his Scriptures. He used Joel to point out that the day of the giving of the Holy Spirit to all people was part of God's plan. What happened on Holy Week and the giving of the Holy Spirit is a continuing salvation story. The death of Jesus was not God's second option after the first option didn't work. The new covenant is a continuation of the first covenant. God is fulfilling His promises. The Old Testament foreshadows what happened in Jesus' death and resurrection.

We also have the New Testament to quote. When we are called to witness the gospel, we should keep the focus on Jesus Christ. Reading scripture, and being able to share scripture is needed today. Since Jesus has conquered sin and death, we should be able to share that message with others.

What Peter did not do was focus on himself. He did not point out that he had sinned by denying Jesus. Then, Jesus came to him and restored him as an apostle. There may be a place for that, but first the message of Jesus needs to be shared. When we share the message of Jesus and keep the focus on him, the Spirit is able to work in the hearts of others. We are able to share with others, "Do not be afraid, Jesus has conquered death itself and invites you to live eternal." May we always be ready to share the message of salvation with others.

Prayer:

Holy Lord, you call us to follow you, to bear witness in speech and deed to the good news of the gospel. But we resist your call, persistently pursuing our own desires, fearful of your claims upon us. Forgive us for seeking to justify our refusal to heed your call. Stir us up by your Spirit to embrace the mission of Jesus Christ—healing the broken, feeding the hungry, and proclaiming the good news that God is indeed with us. Amen.