

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LESSONS FOR APRIL 27, 2025

Acts 5:27-32

- Both last week and this week, we hear the description of Jesus as “hanging ... on a tree,” which might sound strange as we think of Jesus crucified on a cross. The reason that these sermons in Acts use this image is found more fully explained in Galatians 3:13, in which Paul uses this same description of the death of Jesus so that he may connect his death with Deuteronomy 21:23: “anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse.” For Paul – and possibly for these sermons in Acts – Jesus takes on God’s curse – Jesus becomes God’s curse – in order to free us from the consequences of sin.
- There is an irony when the high priest claims that Peter is “determined to bring this man’s blood on us.” Though the high priest thinks that Peter is holding them responsible for the death of Jesus, Peter wants the “blood to be upon them” for their forgiveness. When do we resist God’s grace and forgiveness?
- Do you see any modern instances of when one “must obey God rather than any human authority”? How can we tell when there is a difference?

Psalms 118:14-29

- Though there are a few times in the lectionary cycle when we have a psalm continue over a few weeks, this is one of the only times that we have a section of the psalm that is repeated two weeks in a row. Last week we had Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24. This week we have verses 14-29. By reading these words in light of Easter, we are invited to see how they envision what God has done through the Risen Christ.
- This psalm is a declaration of how God has helped us and given us victory. In these words we are meant to recall of the ways that God has come through for us. When have you felt God’s help?
- Paul (and others) use this psalm to describe what God has done through Jesus when it declares, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.” As with Jesus, so we also claim that even when we feel most defeated, God can turn that into our greatest strength.
- The psalm can also re-orient our thinking and our approach to each day. Consider what it would mean if we begin each day by saying, “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Revelation 1:4-8

- Even with these simple statements, we forget how this language had a political impact upon the early believers. When John wrote this, the emperor at the time claimed the titles of “lord” and “ruler of the kings of earth” for himself alone. By placing these titles on Jesus, the early followers would have set themselves in conflict with the Roman Empire. When do the demands of faith conflict with the demands of society or government today?
- When Jesus refers to himself as “the Alpha and the Omega,” he refers to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. He is saying that he is the beginning and the end of all things. There is no place and no time that Jesus cannot be found.
- These words empower us as we are made “to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father.” We are a kingdom and priests. How do we live this out as individuals? How do we live this out as a church?
- What does John mean by “the seven spirits who are before his throne”?
 1. He could mean “seven” as a metaphorical number, symbolizing completeness.
 2. The early church read this as an understanding of Isaiah 11:2-3: “The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.” In the Greek translation – and in baptism – we hear a seven-fold spirit: “the spirit of wisdom (1) and understanding (2), the spirit of counsel (3) and might (4), the spirit of knowledge (5) and the fear of the Lord (6), the spirit of joy in your presence (7).”
 3. He could refer to the seven stars/seven angels that the risen Jesus will soon hold – “In his right hand he held seven stars The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches” (1:16,20).

4. He could refer to the seven lampstands/seven churches that the Son of Man walks among – “on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man The seven lampstands are the seven churches” (1:12-13, 20).

John 20:19-31

- The greeting that Jesus gives – “Peace be with you” – would be *shalom aleikem* in Aramaic. This ought to sound familiar to our ears as the common greeting with Muslims – *salam aleikum*.
- Scholars believe that this scene represents John’s version of “Pentecost” in that Jesus breathes on them and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” How do you understand the next part of what Jesus says when he empowers the disciples to forgive or retain the sins of others?
- Thomas often receives a “bad rap,” even down to the nickname we often give him: Doubting Thomas. Note that Jesus never condemns or judges Thomas for doubting the resurrection. Rather, Jesus meets Thomas where he is at and reveals himself to him. What doubts have you had about God or Jesus?
- What does it mean that the risen Jesus still retains the wounds of his death. Do we carry our wounds with us after we die? Are our wounds a part of who we are and who we are called to be?
- The other part of the response of Jesus to Thomas is directed to us. We are the ones “who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”
- Note that the gospel provides us with the reason why it is written: “But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” The purpose of our proclamation is for belief and for life. How might we encourage that purpose in what we do?