

# EASTER DAY

Year C

*This Bible study was written by the Rev. Warren Thomas Swenson for Easter Day (C) in 2019.*

## Isaiah 65:17-25

<sup>17</sup> For I am about to create new heavens  
and a new earth;  
the former things shall not be remembered  
or come to mind.  
<sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever  
in what I am creating,  
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy  
and its people as a delight.  
<sup>19</sup> I will rejoice in Jerusalem  
and delight in my people;  
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it  
or the cry of distress.  
<sup>20</sup> No more shall there be in it  
an infant who lives but a few days  
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime,  
for one who dies at a hundred years will be  
considered a youth,  
and one who falls short of a hundred will be  
considered accursed.  
<sup>21</sup> They shall build houses and inhabit them;  
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.  
<sup>22</sup> They shall not build and another inhabit;  
they shall not plant and another eat,  
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people  
be,  
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their  
hands.  
<sup>23</sup> They shall not labor in vain  
or bear children for calamity,  
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—  
and their descendants as well.  
<sup>24</sup> Before they call I will answer,  
while they are yet speaking I will hear.  
<sup>25</sup> The wolf and the lamb shall feed together;  
the lion shall eat straw like the ox,  
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!  
They shall not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain,  
says the Lord.

## Commentary from Warren Swenson

When we think of the trappings of Easter—dying eggs, donning our Sunday best, singing triumphant hymns, and echoing sweet “Alleluias” to proclaim the Risen One—I doubt most of us would even consider the Old Testament lesson. In fact, Easter might be one of the Sundays of the year we pay the least amount of attention to the readings. We know the story. However, it’s worth pausing to take stock of the words of the Hebrew prophets. “I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;” “no more shall the sound of weeping be heard...or the cry of distress;” “the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox.” The vivid imagery of this passage from Isaiah captures the awesome power of a God who saves his people, a God who accomplishes even that which seems impossible. The prophet foretells God’s promise of peace, fulfillment, and longevity. As Christians, we believe that Jesus is central to God’s plan of salvation and we recognize and celebrate God’s saving work, which stretches back even before the earthly life of Jesus, to creation itself.

## Discussion Questions

How do the prophet’s words instill hope in you?

How do the prophet’s arresting images illustrate the power of God?

Are Isaiah’s words still relevant today?

## Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

- <sup>1</sup> Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; \*  
his mercy endures for ever.
- <sup>2</sup> Let Israel now proclaim, \*  
"His mercy endures for ever."
- <sup>14</sup> The Lord is my strength and my song, \*  
and he has become my salvation.
- <sup>15</sup> There is a sound of exultation and victory \*  
in the tents of the righteous:
- <sup>16</sup> "The right hand of the Lord has triumphed! \*  
the right hand of the Lord is exalted!  
the right hand of the Lord has triumphed!"
- <sup>17</sup> I shall not die, but live, \*  
and declare the works of the Lord.
- <sup>18</sup> The Lord has punished me sorely, \*  
but he did not hand me over to death.
- <sup>19</sup> Open for me the gates of righteousness; \*  
I will enter them;  
I will offer thanks to the Lord.
- <sup>20</sup> "This is the gate of the Lord; \*  
he who is righteous may enter."
- <sup>21</sup> I will give thanks to you, for you answered me \*  
and have become my salvation.
- <sup>22</sup> The same stone which the builders rejected \*  
has become the chief cornerstone.
- <sup>23</sup> This is the Lord's doing, \*  
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
- <sup>24</sup> On this day the Lord has acted; \*  
we will rejoice and be glad in it.

## Commentary from Warren Swenson

Here again, we see how our resurrection celebration echoes the ancient faith in God who triumphs over wrong. Often when we sit to pray the psalms, whether during the Eucharist or daily office, we encounter a range of human emotion. From sorrow, suffering, and deep grief, to joy, pleasure, and comfort, the psalms teach us that whatever mood we happen to be in, whatever headspace we might occupy, or however distracted we may be, it is always appropriate to "take it to the Lord in prayer." Today's psalm expresses joyful declarations of triumph and thanksgiving for the Lord's salvation. It makes sense to recite it on Easter Sunday. Amidst the festal Eucharist, it calls to mind God's miraculous victory amidst the ordinary backdrop of our mundane lives.

## Discussion Questions

As you pray this psalm, consider especially verse 24. How does God act in your life each day?

Do you notice signs of God's presence in the world around you?

## 1 Corinthians 15:19-26

<sup>19</sup> If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

<sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. <sup>21</sup> For since death came through a human, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human, <sup>22</sup> for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. <sup>23</sup> But each in its own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

### **Commentary from Warren Swenson**

From Paul's words in 1 Corinthians come the familiar words of the Pascha nostrum, the celebratory Easter anthem which many congregations will sing in place of the Gloria during Easter season. "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. Alleluia." Paul's words help us celebrate the resurrection, but they also represent an attempt to explain the resurrection event theologically. Just as we die daily in our sin, we are continually raised by virtue of the fact that we have been baptized into the life of Christ, who claims ultimate victory over sin and death. Paul clarifies that our hope in Christ is an eternal hope. Although our Christian hope in Jesus certainly does affect the way we live our lives even now, it also stretches beyond our earthly lives, even unto life everlasting.

### **Discussion Questions**

Do we only believe in Christ because of the benefits it brings us in this life?

How does our resurrection hope affect our lives now? What does it promise for our lives to come?

## John 20:1-18

20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” <sup>3</sup> Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup> The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the cloth that had been on Jesus’s head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed, <sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples returned to their homes.

<sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, <sup>12</sup> and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. <sup>13</sup> They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” <sup>14</sup> When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, “Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” <sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and she told them that he had said these things to her.

## Commentary from Warren Swenson

What do you notice first about this famous passage from John’s gospel? Perhaps it is the fear that you imagine is instilled in Mary Magdalene when she realizes that her Lord’s body has been taken. Or maybe you are struck by the seemingly random detail that one disciple outruns the other. I wonder if the exact pronunciation of “Rabbouni!” tripped you up. If you are like me—and you are under no obligation to be—then you might dwell a little while longer on the fact that Mary stays at the tomb when the disciples return to their homes. The text does not explicitly tell us why she does so. We might infer from her weeping that she needs space to grieve the loss of Jesus a second time. Unlike Peter and John, she does not yet understand that he is risen, but she’s about to! In the midst of her despair, Jesus comes. He comes to her right at her most vulnerable, when she least expects it, and most needs it.

## Discussion Questions

Jesus has a funny way of showing up just when we need him, especially when we do not expect him. Does the Risen One ever come to you in that way?

Does Jesus ever surprise you by showing up just when you need him most? How do you know he is there?