

Acts 4:32-35

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1 John 1:1-2:2

1 We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ² this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— ³ we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; ⁷ but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

John 20:19-31

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' ²⁸ Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' ²⁹ Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ 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 gospel passage today is often the source of sermons about doubt, or about 'Doubting Thomas'. Poor Thomas gets rather bad press here – he is actually seen as one of the most courageous of the disciples earlier in John's gospel when he encourages the others to go closer to Jerusalem with Jesus (who is going to raise Lazarus) even though he expects they will all be killed.

I want today to focus more on the Resurrection itself, and what it means for us at several levels. One thing the gospel passage today does illustrate for us is how incredible and awe-inspiring the R is. The disciples themselves display at various times after the event a mixture of disbelief and belief, awe and fear, joy and worship. The R is a singularity – something totally outside of what we think we know can happen, outside of the laws of this universe we know. We too can easily have the same mix of responses to it.

I'm not going to address the fact that the R is definitely an historical event – That is done quite straightforwardly in eg the Alpha course.

But I do want to look a little more closely at what happened to Jesus in his R – both because of what this meant to the disciples and also because this is something that one day we are also going to take part in. Jesus R is the foretaste of what we will experience when God's Kingdom comes in it's fullness, when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, a new humanity we will share in.

First of all through Jesus R appearances we see that he rose bodily – Francis will look a bit more at this next week.

This new body, though recognizable as himself was also different. Just as the event of the R was a singularity outside of our known time/space universe so his body was too. He was no longer bound by the material and spatial limitations of our universe. He could make himself immediately recognizable to his disciples as in today's gospel account or he could in some way obscure his identity and then reveal it as with Mary at the tomb or to those on the road to Emmaus. He had what Paul describes as a spiritual body – as we will one day too. The disciples recognized, wondered at, were amazed by all of this. This was the beginning of a new humanity that all who believed in would be part of. This needed time to sink in but soon they were telling others and beginning to live in the light of this reality.

So what did Jesus being raised from the dead mean to them and to us? What difference does it really make?

We can look at what the apostles themselves said about this to see its significance on the broadest canvas. In Acts 2:36 Peter says **36**"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." God raising

Jesus from the dead shows that rather than being cursed by God as they believed anyone who died by hanging was, he was vindicated by God – he is shown to be the Christ (Greek) the Messiah (Hebrew) and he is declared Lord – like God – as God’s Son. The work he did on the cross in taking on all of the worst of humanity is shown to be the act of God meeting humanity in that place. It proves that the power of death and sin has been broken. The cross is nothing without the R.

So firstly the R vindicates all that was said by Jesus, all that he did in his life and death, all that he was for us. Secondly the R leads to Jesus being exalted – he is now our living Lord and King – at God’s right hand. This means he has the power of God and the dominion of God. He reigns over all the earth with the same power that raised him from the dead. From this place he has poured out the Holy Spirit of God upon us to enable us, his church, his body here on Earth to witness to that R power. As Peter quotes Joel in his first sermon, God’s Spirit is poured out on all flesh, first at Pentecost and then upon all who believe. To quote Peter in Acts 2:32-33 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. ³³Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

This is the big picture. Now some of the implications of this for our daily life. To do this I want to concentrate on what our first reading shows us of the implications of the R for the lives of the first followers of the R Jesus.

Reread Acts 4:32-35

³² Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. ³³ With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. ³⁵ They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

This mentions giving testimony to the R in the middle of three verses on something that looks rather like some form of communism. So how are we to understand this sharing of resources, this community of goods and apply it to ourselves? What has that to do with testifying to the RJ?

First we have to put the passage in its context. The early church experienced great growth – about 3000 the first day! Then Luke first describes in summary the life of the early church community at the end of Acts 2.

Acts then describes the healing ministry of Peter and John, their preaching of the RJ, and the opposition to this and resulting imprisonment. Peter and John then testify again before the Jewish leaders to the R power in healing and are released and told not to preach this again. They immediately gather with other believers and pray for more boldness to preach the RJ and receive more of the Spirit's power.

Luke again summarises the life of the community with a focus on the behaviour of sharing their possessions and selling them as needed to share with those among them who were needy.

Then this summary passage is followed by examples of people sharing their resources –first Barnabas who sells a field and gives the proceeds to the Apostles to administer. Notice that a short time later the apostles realize that this administration was threatening to distract them from their preaching the message so the whole community chose a group to do this for them. The second example is of Ananias and Sapphira who also sell a field but lie about how much of the proceeds they are giving with rather sad consequences.

So why repeat this summary of this aspect of the life of the early church here and why mention testifying to the R in the middle of this description of their sharing of resources?

All through these first few chapters of Acts the R is central, its proclamation, the demonstration of R power especially in healing and living in the light of the R.

Central to this passage is the closeness of all those in the church community, (of one heart and soul, one in heart and mind) close to the point where they even shared all their possessions together. However note that it is not living in this sort of close knit community that brings God's great grace but giving testimony to the R. Sharing resources with one another is not the end goal, it illustrates how they were of one heart and mind – and this oneness of purpose was centred in testifying to the R of Jesus with power. These believers gave their all for this common purpose of the community and they gave specifically so that the leaders could steward these resources for this. Note – this is not at all giving to the poor in general – this is about the life of the church community - about giving to those who were needy so that the whole body (as Paul later calls it) is healthy to proclaim the R in word, power and lifestyle. The examples also illustrate that everyone didn't sell everything to have a big common purse, either. Rather each regarded what he had as a resource for the purpose of the whole. The basis of their proclamation of the R through their lifestyle was the unity of purpose worked out in their dedicating all for that purpose. Through this they were blessed with much grace and power.

They came together for the purpose of testifying to the RJ and not to get their needs met. They shared their resources so that no one was needy and distracted by the struggle to get

those needs met. This is about the church stewarding the resources of all the members together for the one purpose of proclaiming the gospel.

These 4 verses illustrate an aspect of living in the light of the R. Are we supposed to live exactly the same? Not exactly. We live in a different context – but in essence – yes.

So how do we reflect this today? First of all are our lives centred both individually and together on the proclamation of the risen Jesus Christ, who he is, what he has done, his kingship and his power? Are we of one purpose in testifying to the risen Jesus in word, in power and in our lifestyle?

This passage from Acts today calls us to look especially at how our lifestyle may reflect our unity of heart and mind in testifying to the Risen Jesus. Are we a body that is healthy enough to fulfill this common purpose? For example, do we leave the problems and difficulties of our Brothers and Sisters in this church family for themselves to deal with while we look after our selves and try to make sure our own needs are met? Or do we live with such a oneness that we share our resources of any sort so that as a whole we can proclaim the gospel? These resources are not just financial. They include our transport, houses, abilities, time. Some examples –providing transport for someone to come to church most Sundays, providing those without accommodation a place to stay with us for a while, spending hours of work enabling us to meet in this place and to be built up in our faith and understanding of the gospel we proclaim, using ones different giftings and abilities to build each other up as well as to witness to the risen Christ in our different life settings. We are actually called to dedicate it all to Jesus! How do we think about these resources, our time, money, abilities, - as things we individually steward or as things we hold in common with the body and even let the leaders of the body steward for the purpose of proclaiming the R in word, power and life?

Acts 4 :32-35 shows us followers of Jesus proclaiming his R in unity of purpose and with a freedom that sharing all they had for that purpose gave them. They laid their resources before the Apostles to steward for this. We have a Vestry that is charged with the stewardship of the resources of our own church community. Please pray for them in this and as our AGM approaches consider who might be nominated to be entrusted with this.

We are now going to share in a time of proclaiming the R in another way. When we pray in Jesus' name, in the name of our risen and reigning Lord, we are trusting that the power that raised him from the dead is at work.

Prayer time.