

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Second Sunday of Easter – Year B

RCL Readings – Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; I John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

ACNA Readings – Acts 3:12-26 or Isaiah 26:1-9, 19; Psalm 111; I John 5:1-5; John 20:19-31

Seasonal Introduction. Eastertide, the season of Easter, is always 50 days long. It follows the pattern of the Jewish calendar with 50 days from Passover to *Shavuot* or Pentecost. During these days we remember the last weeks of Jesus on earth after His resurrection. Easter is all about the resurrection! This season's traditional greetings of "He is risen!" and "He is risen indeed!" can bring hope and light to our broken world. "If Christ is risen, nothing else matters. And if Christ is not risen—nothing else matters."¹

Common Theme. The impact of the resurrection holds a central place in our readings this week. The resurrection is not just a theological necessity; it is also a biological reality. For our faith to have any meaning or our hope to have any value the resurrection must be a real event. It is through the resurrection that we can have unity, fellowship, and peace—the theme of this week's readings.

Hebraic Context. Paul admonishes us to walk out our salvation with fear and trembling. Believing in Jesus, and thus following Him, is often called the walk of faith. The verb 'to walk' in Hebrew is ללכת *lechet*. The walk of faith (or the way to walk out your faith) is called הלכה *halacha*, being derived from the verb to walk. In the Hebraic mind halacha is the practical application of the commandments of the Lord—how we do our faith.² Without this practical application, the faith is dead and useless.

Paul used the term 'walk' many times throughout his epistles and it always refers to daily conduct of the believer. In Colossians 1:10-12 Paul exhorted the community to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." I John 1 similarly states that if we do not walk in the light we do not practice the truth.

The command to walk does not mean that salvation is something earned or worked for. The resurrection of Jesus is necessary for salvation. Without the grace of God and the faithful action of Jesus going to the cross and the authority, power, and faithfulness of God shown in the resurrection, our faith would be pitiful and not be a salvation at all. But the Epistles also reflect on the state of salvation as something happening in the present. 1 Corinthians 1:18 describes the message of the cross as the power of God "for those *being saved*." We have our own personal testimonies of how we encountered Jesus, believed in His name, and entered into

¹ Jaroslav Pelikan

² Faith in Hebrew is a verb, an action.

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fellowship with God. But that is not where the story ended, only where it began. We are all urged to run the race and to be overcomers—at which point we will indeed receive our reward.

Acts 4:32-35.³ Certain behaviours are often expected to be connected with the filling of the Holy Spirit. Here we find two such behaviours: unity of the believers and a powerful proclamation of the word of God. Acts 4 elaborates on the unity of the believers in Acts 2 where the disciples of Jesus were “all together in one place”. At Pentecost, when there was unity, God visited His people. In Acts 4:31-32, when God visited His people, they were made to be unified.⁴

We also know that the Holy Spirit helps us speak powerfully.⁵ In Acts 4:31-33, the apostles specifically spoke about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The resurrection was an extremely important topic during this period, not only regarding the resurrection of Jesus but also the general question of whether the miraculous was even possible.⁶

Acts 4:33 speaks twice of great power, first in regards to the Apostles—they had great power to speak.⁷ Second, the great power of God. So often in Scripture we find that God does not work alone, He works with and through people—usually through those who follow Him but sometimes through those in rebellion or even through nature. However, Acts 4:33 almost seems to be talking about two completely different subjects. First, the apostles were given power to preach

³ During the Season of Easter, it is common practice to read the sacred history from the book of Acts. While Luke's historical discourse is often called the *Acts of the Apostles*, it could just as easily have been called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. As the season of Passover and Easter turns to the season of Shavuot and Pentecost we can see the meaning behind Jesus' words, “it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you.” (John 16:7)

⁴ Unity among God's people is important to God. Exodus 19:1-2 and 8 was used by early Jewish scholars to show that God met with Israel only when they could become one. Acts 2, and here in Acts 4, show that God still meets with those who are unified. Conversely, Jesus is clear in Matthew 5:23-24 that if we lack unity and peace with our brothers we should first fix that before we go to God.

⁵ Peter's speech in Acts 2 is, perhaps, the best known speech from the Apostles following the filling of the Holy Spirit, where he speaks boldly of Jesus as sent by God with authority, Jesus crucified and with authority raised from the dead, and that Jesus is both Lord and Messiah. But Acts 13:51-14:1 is another example of Paul and Barnabas being filled with the Holy Spirit before powerfully preaching in Iconium. (See also Acts 11:24).

⁶ The Sadducee's are famous for not believing in the resurrection during the last 2nd Temple period. While the majority of Jewish scholars and people believed in the resurrection during Jesus' lifetime, it was often in relation to an eschatological event. The resurrection as a present reality, even with the examples in the Hebrew Bible, was rarely included as part of a practical part of Jewish life (as shown even in Martha's response to Jesus after the death of Lazarus).

⁷ The Gospels note that Jesus spoke like one who had authority. In the 1st century, teachers would very rarely get up and teach without referencing an earlier teacher. Jesus, on the other hand, always spoke directly on the passage of Scripture He was handed to read in the synagogue. As His disciples, the Apostles spoke in the name of Jesus—under His authority. The Apostles constantly referred back to Jesus as they taught but they were given the authority to do so by Jesus.

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the good news of Jesus' resurrection. But the grace of God's power that worked in the apostles was not to gift them with greater power to preach the resurrection, it was to increase unity and practical love. If these two matters seem unconnected, perhaps we should reexamine what authority and power we are given because of Jesus' resurrection, His ascension, His intercession, and God's gift of the Holy Spirit.

Psalm 133.⁸ Unity is both good and pleasant.⁹ David proceeded to refer to two incredibly important images that, unfortunately, are largely ignored. First, David references Leviticus 8 where Aaron was consecrated by Moses (his brother) at the command of God.¹⁰ The importance of priests and a high priest can be easily lost when we consider that all believers are priests and Jesus is our high priest.¹¹ The anointing of Aaron was not just for Aaron and Moses, but was to be a blessing to the whole nation and many of the righteous among the nations.

The second image David referenced was a geographical image, the dew of Hermon. Hermon is in the far north of Israel and is not like Jerusalem at all.¹² Hermon receives rain and snow annually in great abundance.¹³ Meanwhile, Jerusalem is on the edge of a rainshadow and only had a small spring, the Gihon, to provide water for the people of Jerusalem when it wasn't the

⁸ Psalm 133 is part of the Songs of Ascent, Psalm 120-134, traditionally sung during the pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem.

⁹ The phrase good and pleasant only appears three times in the Bible, the other two both speak of the interaction between God and His worshippers, Psalm 135:3 and Psalm 147:1. Both of these Psalms continue by showing how God has interacted with those He chose and saved. Psalm 133 is also in the context of the Psalms of Ascent—the people are going to the place where God chose to dwell among His people.

¹⁰ Exodus 29:7 and 30:30

¹¹ Exodus 19:6 states that Israel, too, was to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” And yet, God still chose the Levite tribe to be set apart for service to Him along with the line of Aaron as priests. We are very familiar with Jeremiah 33:17, “David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel.” Jesus, as the descendant of David, will be an everlasting king. But verse 18 also states, “And the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever.” (The burnt offering is neither about sin nor turning away the wrath of God. It is, however, a pleasing aroma to the LORD.) Jesus is not of the Levitical priesthood (which is why the author of Hebrews declares He is of the order of Melchizedek). But there will still be Levites to make freewill offerings to God as long as there is day and night.

¹² Hermon is the most impressive and most important mountain in the land of Israel. But it was not chosen by God. Psalm 68:15-16 says, “O mountain of God [or gods], mountain of Bashan; O many-peaked mountain, mountain of Bashan! Why do you look with Hatred, O many-peaked mountain, at the mount that God desired for His abode, yes, where the LORD will dwell forever?” God chose Jerusalem, an insignificant and unimpressive mountain—a mountain that required God's blessing to support a large city.

¹³ The spring that flows from Dan, the main source of the Jordan river, is the largest karstic spring in the Middle East. The discharge of water from Hermon was, for some time, the main yearly source of water for both Israel and Jordan. The winter and spring rains generally provide enough water for crops to grow and recent desalination of the Mediterranean has helped ease the effect of having 21,000,000 citizens within Israel and Jordan.

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rainy season. Rain is the lifeblood of Israel and is a direct blessing from God.¹⁴ When brothers dwell together in unity, it is as if they are receiving the greatest possible blessing from God.

The end of the *Sh'ma* discourse is all about choosing God's blessing (rather than His curse) in Deuteronomy 11.¹⁵ Israel was given a choice in Deuteronomy 11 and Deuteronomy 30 to choose blessings or curses, life or death. They should, of course, choose blessing and life. In both instances, the direct context is the exact same phrase, "If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today." As David referenced the rain in Deuteronomy 11, now he states that the blessing of life comes out of unity. This unity surely comes from obedience to God, loving Him with all our heart, soul, and might and loving our neighbour as ourselves—and thanks be to God that He showed us the way to love through His commandments.¹⁶

I John 1:1-2:2. Many of the senses were described as bearing witness to both the reality and the physical nature of the risen Lord. Many people saw the risen Lord, becoming an eyewitness. But people also smelled the frying fish and bread Jesus had prepared and ate with the risen Lord. They physically interacted with Jesus as they were invited to touch the wounds of Jesus' crucifixion. And they heard Jesus declare "peace" to those who had previously betrayed Him.¹⁷

I John starts with, "That which was from the beginning". The readers of the epistle may have only recently heard about this thing which was from the beginning but it was not recent. Exactly which 'beginning' is being referred to by the Epistle of John is vague. However, it is very reminiscent of the Gospel of John which begins with, "In the beginning". The author states that they too were an eyewitness to the resurrected Messiah, described as the word (*logos*) of life.¹⁸

The resurrection is more than a theological construct. It is a historical fact. And eternal life is more than a theological construct. It is a person. The Messiah was called ζῶν τὴν αἰώνιον *zoen*

¹⁴ At the end of the *Sh'ma* discourse in Deuteronomy 11:13-15, God is clear that if Israel is obedient and loves the Lord their God with all their heart and soul then He will send the rain on Israel—for their produce and their livestock.

¹⁵ The *Sh'ma*, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, is very well known in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 as the greatest of the commandments. However, the discourse continues, from Deuteronomy 6:3-11:32.

¹⁶ Unity does not mean that we all theologically think alike. Unity is surely a behaviour and, according to Psalm 133, unity on earth attracts the Divine presence (blessing) of God.

¹⁷ Using all the senses in worship of God and in walking out our faith was important for the Jewish people. David declares in Psalm 34:8 "taste and see that the LORD is good." Too often, perhaps, we focus only on hearing or reading the word of God and too little on the thanksgiving, joy, or labour that comes with taste, touch or other everyday senses and activities we should also participate with to walk out our faith.

¹⁸ Again the wording of *logos* is similar to the opening of the Gospel of John lending some support to the notion that John is referring to the beginning of time and creation—and, specifically, its creator. This life was manifest to many eyewitnesses, as testified also in John 21:1, 14.

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ten aiōnion the eternal life, having preexisted with the Father before becoming man to “fellowship with us”. The nature of eternal life is not relegated to a future hope but is a present reality. Jesus is, and offers, eternal life right now. John wrote that the purpose of declaring the things we¹⁹ have seen and heard is for fellowship.²⁰ Unbelievably, the fellowship relationship is extended even for us to be with the Father and the Son. Except that is what God always desired—to be with His people.²¹ The result of this fellowship is pure joy.

But fellowship with God, like faith, is walked out in the light. In his epistle, John returned to the treatise of John 1 (and Genesis 1)—God (and the *Logos*) is light and has no darkness! But he then makes a connection between the desire for fellowship with one another and with God to obedience and the walk of faith—described as a pattern of life by walking in light (or darkness in disobedience). Faith is an action and walking in the light is being obedient to the Lord.

John 3:21 says that those who do the truth (not only believe the truth) come to the light. Walking in darkness is a lifestyle of disobedience, not simply a moment of falling into sin. John states that we all sin, even those who are walking in the light. The truth is something that is put into practice and not only accepted as belief or fact. We are urged to confess those sins, having the assurance and knowing that God is faithful to forgive.²²

John notes the connection between fellowship, walking in the light, practicing the truth (being obedient to the Lord, including acknowledging and confessing our sins) and the redemptive blood of Jesus, who is our advocate in heaven. Walking in the light wasn't to be a terrible burden, it should be an encouragement as we are able to fellowship with a faithful and forgiving God.

John 20:19-31.²³ After most of the day had passed, the disciples only had the witness of Mary concerning Jesus' resurrection.²⁴ The disciples are still hiding in a room that is “locked for fear of

¹⁹ The author of John and the Epistles of John is anonymous and unknown. Lazarus and John are the most common names associated with the works.

²⁰ The Greek word for fellowship is *κοινωνία koinonia* which is derived from the root word *κοινωνός koinonos*, which literally means partner or sharer, in the sense of something mutually shared by everyone. Romans 15:26-27 is a prime example of fellowship. The Greeks were happy to share what they had, money, as the Jewish people in Jerusalem had shared with them the spiritual blessings.

²¹ Exodus 25:8, 29:45; Leviticus 26:12 (and II Corinthians 6:16) and, as at the beginning (Genesis 3:8) so to at the end (Revelation 21:3)

²² Confessions is not something invented by Christianity or the Catholic church, it has a long history in the Hebrew Bible and Judaism.

²³ Some Orthodox churches call the second Sunday of Easter “Thomas Sunday” as the reading from John 20:26-29 occurs on the eighth day of Eastertide.

²⁴ Luke also mentions that Jesus spent some time traveling to Emmaus and the two disciples He traveled with returned as witnesses to the disciples.

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the Jews.” The Jews mentioned here are the Jewish leadership of the temple that conspired with the Romans in the death of Jesus. Perhaps the same fate now awaited them, thus the disciples were scared, nervous, uncertain of current events, and unsure of the future.²⁵

Suddenly Jesus was in the room.²⁶ The testimonies of the resurrection the disciples had heard were confirmed. Jesus revealed that He was neither a spirit or ghost, the same body that went into the tomb was the same body that stood before the disciples now.²⁷ For the first time, the disciples saw the wounds of their master whom they had abandoned. But instead of harsh words of rebuke for having abandoned Him in the Garden of Gethsemane to face the cross alone, Jesus began by announcing “peace”.²⁸

It is in this context that Jesus speaks of forgiveness. Jesus does not seem to command His disciples to forgive the sins of others here. Rather, Jesus states the relationship between forgiving and forgiveness. For many Christians this might seem strange to our senses, as surely it is the Lord who takes away the sin of the world. However, active participation by Jesus' followers in the practice of forgiveness is not new here in John. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray in Matthew 6:14, the condition to receiving forgiveness was our ability to engage in forgiveness.²⁹ The warning that forgiveness will be withheld is not new here.³⁰

²⁵ The disciple-teacher relationship in 2nd Temple Judaism was to be closer than that of a parent and a child. Rabbi Akiva was said to be flayed alive in Caesarea by the Romans, but tradition states that his disciples stood next to him and witnessed his final prayers while they encouraged him with their presence. Mishneh Torah 5.1 states that a person, who is to honor their father and mother because they brought them into this world, should honor their teacher who teaches them wisdom as this can bring them life in the world to come. Therefore, the honoring of a teacher should actually take precedence over that of a parent. Meanwhile, the disciples of Jesus not only abandoned Him in His greatest time of need, but were still afraid even after they heard accounts of Jesus' resurrection.

²⁶ There is no explanation of how Jesus appears in the room. John 20:19, 26 is left vague and allows for the miraculous with the latter being a little more obviously miraculous. Interestingly, John does not include the story of Jesus' journey to Emmaus, which partly explains the passing of the day (Luke 24:13-30) and also indicates that Jesus could come and go as He wished (Luke 24:31).

²⁷ While Jesus was raised from the dead, He retained the marks He had received during His life. He also remained fully Human, though John is very clear that He is God. Interestingly, Jesus, having been brought into the Jewish covenant, will remain Jewish for eternity in His physical body—just as God has never divorced the Jewish people.

²⁸ See Hebraic Perspective

²⁹ There are many instances where Jesus taught this relationship of forgiveness. See Mark 11:26; Matthew 18:35; Luke 17:4.

³⁰ The question here is whose forgiveness is withheld? If the disciple of Jesus withholds forgiveness, will the offending party suffer adversely on the day of judgment? The statement is vague, particularly as the withheld forgiveness has no definite pronoun attached to it. However, based on similar teachings of Jesus it would actually be the disciple whose forgiveness would be withheld if they do not forgive others.

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Forgiveness is hard.³¹ Jesus not only came into the room of the disciples and declared “peace be with you”, He also gave the disciples a charge. “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” The disciple of Jesus has a teacher to learn from, but they also have some authority—we are to act in that authority.³² The disciples are not to perform the mission alone, they will be given the Holy Spirit. The gospel connects the Lord breathing on the disciples with the impartation of the Holy Spirit.^{33 34}

The gospel passage concludes with Thomas encountering the risen Lord. He had not been present when Jesus breathed on the others, for eight days Thomas continued to be in suspended belief. The readers are not informed as to why Thomas was absent from the disciples in the first resurrection encounter, nor what transpired during the week. Jesus entered the room in the same mysterious fashion, greeted them in peace once more and approached Thomas. Thomas now had the evidence that he demanded. Jesus did not rebuke Thomas, just commanded him to believe and Thomas did.³⁵

Hebraic Perspective. When Jesus rose from the tomb He greeted His disciples, who were full of fear and hiding in a room, with the word “peace”. In Hebrew that word is *shalom* שלום. Shalom does mean peace, but words in almost all languages mean so much more than a single nuance and in Hebrew this is also the case. Shalom comes from the verb *L'Shalem* לשלם which

³¹ See C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* book 3 chapter 7 on forgiveness.

³² A disciple of Jesus cannot sit around passively. God sent Jesus because He loved the world. Jesus submitted Himself to God, obeyed Him, and acted with great compassion. Now Jesus has sent out His disciples to do the same. John also includes this sending out in the only long-form prayer of Jesus we have received, John 17:18.

³³ Once again John returns to the Genesis account of creation as he seems to allude to the first time God breathed life into Adam.

³⁴ At this point it would be fair to assume that the disciples have now received the Holy Spirit. However in Acts 1:8 Jesus instructs His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they “receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Did John make a mistake in the timing of the gift of the Spirit?

In the context of Acts, Jesus told His disciples that they would be baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). To Jewish disciples, the idea of baptism was something that you performed every day. Baptism was not a one off affair as it became in Christian tradition but a continual ritual. For the disciples of Jesus, to hear of a baptism of the Holy Spirit meant a daily infilling and empowerment of the Spirit of God to aid and assist in their lives and mission. They may already have the Holy Spirit but they are also expecting to be filled by the Spirit with power.

³⁵ Jesus also stated that those who do not see but believe will be blessed. Yet the final statement of the book is that the purpose of the book was so that we can believe that Jesus is the Christ. The book was written because those who did see Jesus wanted to testify to the truth just as Jesus had sent them to do.

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means ‘to pay’. The root of the word shalom is שָׁלוֹם *shalem* and it means ‘paid’. Further שָׁלוֹם *shalem* can also be used as an adjective to describe something that is whole.³⁶

The disciples were said to be afraid, far from peace. They had also abandoned their teacher and were beginning to hear rumors that He was alive. They were likely uncertain and full of shame and certainly afraid. So when Jesus appeared, it was a miracle—the resurrection was true! But how would Jesus react to them? Jesus declared שָׁלוֹם Peace. How did He bring Peace? Jesus had paid the price, and He had paid it in full. Jesus wanted fellowship with any who walk after Him in the light and was willing to forgive them and be their teacher. All of that wrapped up in one word. Shalom שָׁלוֹם.

ACNA Readings

Acts 3:12-26. Peter’s first two recorded sermons (Acts 2 and Acts 3) both occurred in the Temple precincts in Jerusalem, demonstrating the important role that the Temple continued to play in the lives and faith of the disciples. In both speeches, Peter emphasized the veracity of the resurrection through the testimony of eyewitnesses. A crowd gathered to hear Peter after seeing the miraculous healing of a lame man as the disciples entered the Temple for prayer.³⁷

The first thing Peter did was to connect Jesus as the servant of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (not divorcing Him from His Jewish heritage). Jesus is also called the Holy One, a term used in the Hebrew Bible more than 40 times as a title of God the Father, particularly in Isaiah.³⁸ This is an obvious divine exaltation of Jesus by Peter, and yet, interestingly, he is not challenged as a blasphemer (the Sadducees seem to be more interested in preventing talk of the resurrection, a doctrine that would overthrow their long-proclaimed teaching). The Holy Spirit

³⁶ When people go to the market in Jerusalem and want a whole roast chicken, They will use the word שָׁלוֹם to describe the type of chicken they require. That means the whole thing including the neck, even some of the feathers are often still attached.

³⁷ Peter and John saw no problem with continuing their Jewish tradition of praying at certain times or places during the day, including the Temple.

³⁸ “The Holy One of Israel”, in particular, is used 25 times throughout the entirety of Isaiah in addition to terms like “The Holy One” or “I am your LORD, Your Holy One, the Creator.”

The continuity of this phrase, found so often in Isaiah but only six times outside of Isaiah (II Kings 19:22; Psalm 71:22, 78:41, 89:18; Jeremiah 50:29, 51:5; [and Ezekiel 39:7, “Holy One in Israel”]) is one argument against the division of Isaiah into Proto-Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah, and Trito-Isaiah. While there is an obvious difference in Isaiah 1-39 and Isaiah 40-66, the modern literary criticism of a pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic analysis of Isaiah is being challenged more and more by scholars who point to the literary unity of the book as from a single author at a specific time.

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and the truth of the resurrection gave the apostle great boldness to proclaim the Good News. The healing of the lame man is then attributed to the Name of Jesus.³⁹

Peter did not shy away from declaring that the people rejected Jesus and allowed His execution under Pilate. But also that they did so in ignorance. They were not immediately or eternally condemned by Peter or God, in fact, they should be blessed.⁴⁰ He did not want them to remain in ignorance though and called for repentance.⁴¹

Repentance is a key feature of the salvation process. Repentance has been the clarion call of the New Testament since the days of John the Baptist. The salvation process begins with repentance, a turning to God as a new creation in the Messiah with the result of the forgiveness of sins (described here as the blotting out of sins as though from a book or the pages of a ledger). Peter's boldness was met with repentance as many turned from their ignorance.

Isaiah 26:1-9, 19. This passage begins with the phrase “in that day” בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא which is a Hebrew expression that often points towards the messianic era also known as the “days of the Messiah.” The context of the prophecy of Isaiah is the Assyrian expansion threatening the territorial integrity of Israel and Judah. The political climate was dangerous and uncertain and there was also a potential Babylonian incursion.

The prophet declared that, amidst the lack of surety, “we have a strong city.” In Jewish exegetical tradition, cities are not positive.⁴² The Scriptures offer one city only that is a beacon of

³⁹ The disciples of Jesus were to become known in the Jewish community as miraculous healers. As an example, in the Talmud, *Tosefta Chullin* and *Avodah Zarah*, there is a story where Rabbi Ishmael's nephew was bitten by a snake. Though a follower of Jesus named Jacob is available to heal the nephew using Jesus' name, Rabbi Ishmael, aware of the miraculous healing powers ascribed to Jesus' disciples, declines the offer, allowing his nephew to die.

⁴⁰ The blessing was dependent on whether they would listen to Jesus, who Peter declared to be the prophet spoken of by Moses in Deuteronomy 18, and turn from wickedness in repentance (as it is for all people). Peter only had to briefly reference Moses, the prophet (Jesus), and the former prophets as he was on the Temple Mount and most of his audience was very familiar with the Scriptures.

⁴¹ Repentance is a key feature of the salvation process. Repentance has been the clarion call of the New Testament since the days of John the Baptist and long before in the days of the prophets. The salvation process begins with repentance, a turning to God as a new creation in the Messiah with the result of the forgiveness of sins (described here as the blotting out of sins as though from a book or the pages of a ledger).

⁴² Before the fall, God created a garden and placed man within it. After the fall, Cain murdered Abel and then started to found cities. There were no godly cities in Biblical history. Proverbs 18:10-12 states that the righteous run to God, but “a rich man's wealth is his strong city.” The scribes wrote of the cities that the kings built up to store earthly treasures they had strictly been forbidden to keep (I Kings 9:19, 10:26-29). Isaiah seems to hold the same exegesis as he continued by stating, “He has humbled the inhabitants of the height, the lofty city.”

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hope and light, and that is Jerusalem, the place where the Lord will put His Name. Unfortunately, it remained a strong city only in the way of men during the days of Isaiah. So what makes a strong city? Open gates and a people whose eyes and mind are looking and trusting in God. Using poetic language Isaiah declares that the city of God will be salvation and will be open to the righteous among the nations. Jerusalem was not only the cultural capital of the Jewish people, it was also a spiritual hub that permeates the message of God to all the nations of the world.⁴³

Verse 19 is one of the rare glimpses into the early understanding of the resurrection and a life after death.⁴⁴ This isn't simply a spiritual resurrection but also of the body.⁴⁵ Resurrection is not a problem for God, those who have died are dust but from dust they were made in the image of God as He breathed into them the breath of life. Unfortunately, going back to the time of trouble the people were instead going to have to close their gates and hide as God would come to punish the iniquitous.

Psalm 111.⁴⁶ This Psalm is set, like many Psalms, “in the company of the upright, in the congregation.” Psalms were sung and prayed in the Temple, where the upright gathered together to worship in sacrifice, praise, learning, and (as Psalm 112 points out) faithful obedience through action. In all of these actions, the celebrants gave thanks with their whole heart.

Rejoice, give thanks, praise the LORD. But for what? The first half of the poem (Psalm 111) primarily proclaims and celebrates the mighty deeds of the Lord.⁴⁷ The actions of God give us insight into His character.⁴⁸ We know more about God through what He has done and studying

⁴³ While Isaiah was clear that Israel was to be a light to the nations, in Isaiah 26:2 the righteous nation is singular.

⁴⁴ See also Ezekiel 37:12; Daniel 12:2; Hosea 13:14; II Maccabees 7

⁴⁵ Contrasted with Isaiah 26:13-14.

⁴⁶ The author of Psalm 111 is unknown, however, they have beautifully crafted a double abecedary acrostic poem. Apart from the opening imperative to ‘Praise the Lord’ (*Hallelujah*), every sentence begins with the next successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet using all 22 Hebrew characters for the 22 line (not verse) psalm. Psalm 111 can hardly be read without including its counterpart, Psalm 112.

⁴⁷ Many Psalms tell of the deeds of the LORD. Psalm 111 is actually somewhat unique in not providing specific acts of God. Perhaps Psalm 111 allows the worshipper to remember the great works of God in their own life, even as they remember what He has done in history and for their fellow congregants with whom they stand.

⁴⁸ God is and will always be God, He does not change. And yet, we somehow continuously change who He is in our minds. Other times we are told that the creator God (or merciful God, or God of judgment, or some other attribute) is such in every religion and therefore what difference does it make if we follow Allah or the God of Jacob. If we want to know who God is, we must examine what He has declared—His testimony—and His deeds.

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them. The works of God include His calling of a people through the covenants and his protection of and provision for that people.

The most common command in the Hebrew Scriptures is 'to remember'. One way to recall the good things God has done is to include them in our prayers. The psalmist wanted the worshipper to remember the wondrous deeds of the Lord, noting that He also remembers His covenant and promises. The works of God are called truth (some translated as faithful) and justice. From this we can conclude that God will be faithful to bring about His promises spoken through the Torah and the Prophets.

The final verse; '*Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*' is echoed in Proverbs 9:10 and Job 28:28—and more immediately in Psalm 112:1 as the Psalmist turns to how we fear God. Fear, not in the sense of being scared—such a fear is inadequate—but in the sense of awesome respect for the power and authority of God. This fear leads to walking in the footsteps of God.⁴⁹ Wisdom is not often a quality or characteristic that our society values highly as opposed to other values or characteristics. Rarely do we say of our children, "I hope they grow up to have wisdom in the truth." Rarer still do we raise them up to have wisdom in the truth. More commonly we hope our children grow up to be "brilliant, happy and successful." While there is nothing wrong with desiring success and blessing for the next generation, the Bible explicitly desires we seek wisdom—the application of knowledge and understanding.

I John 5:1-5. Love and commandments are contrary to so many in this world, but John tells us that obedience in the commands of God and love of God and man go hand in hand. Perhaps one of the misunderstandings surrounding the commandments is that we think it places a burden on us. Poor exegesis and ignorance concerning God's instructions is part of the problem but the deception of the world also leads us to think that obedience to God is contrary to love.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Tertullian, in *Prescription against Heretics* 43, states that, if there is no fear of God (or reason to fear God) all things are permitted. But the only time there is no fear of God is in the place God does not exist and where God does not exist, there is no truth. However, where God does exist...

"... there exists 'the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom.' Where the fear of God is, there is seriousness, an honourable and yet thoughtful diligence, as well as an anxious carefulness and a well-considered admission (to the sacred ministry) and a safely-guarded communion, and promotion after good service, and a scrupulous submission (to authority), and a devout attendance, and a modest gait, and a united church, and God in all things."

⁵⁰ Ask a dozen people on the street what love is and you will get at least a dozen different definitions. Sacrifice, the first thing connected to love in the Bible, obedience, and humility aren't likely to be a major component of any of those definitions.

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

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Faith has been discussed before as an action and not a series of doctrines and dogmas and certainly not a nebulous hope.⁵¹ Likewise love in the Scriptures is not simply an emotion nor a feeling but also an action. “God so loved the world” that He did something—He sent the Son. Anything that comes from God is good.⁵² By our faith, our action of obedience to God’s commandments, we overcome the deception of the world and proclaim our love of God and the children of God.

The Gospel is counter-cultural. Jesus declared that His yoke was easy and His burden was light. We must not succumb to the hostility of the world, nor to hate, nor to individualism. Rather we “overcome” to genuinely engage in actions of love, compassion, mercy, and grace to each other. These actions of love will be a light that shines in the darkness—for these are not deeds of darkness—and attract people to Jesus, the resurrection and the life.

⁵¹ Although, our faith in action is based on specific things—the commandments of God and the deeds of God.

⁵² Imagine the world today if we all read the Scriptures and chose to love God with all their heart, soul, and might. There would be no murder or war, no need for locked doors as there would be no thieves, no jealousy, and where there were the poor, the widow, or the sick there would be neighbours who would insure there was food, comfort, and intercession. That is a world of obedience to the commands of God. It is also far from our own world of fear, pride, and greed.