Exegetical Notes for April 2018

Our thanks to the Rev. Barb Borle, Honorary Assistant at St. Leonard-on-the-Hill, Red Deer, for writing the Lectionary Notes this month.

April 1, 2018 – Easter Sunday

John 20:1-18 - Jesus is Risen! Alleluia!

Thoughts for Reflection:

Although the whole of our faith rests on the understanding of Easter day and the resurrection, perhaps Easter Sunday is not a day for 'theologizing' but a day for celebration. We are an Easter people! We are resurrection people! We are an Alleluia people! We trust and believe and have our hope in his grace and peace and resurrection. Our hearts indeed should be filled with joy as our Easter greeting reminds us. Some points that might bring that home:
Mary did not know who Jesus was until he called her by name. It is Jesus who calls us, and he will not stop calling us. We may not always see him or recognize him in our lives, but he is always present, always calling us to himself and the Father. How does that feel today/in difficult times/in times of grief as Mary was experiencing?
Jesus sends Mary to his brothers and sisters. In the resurrection, we become forever brothers and sisters in Christ. Forever the family of God. How does being family look in the church/community/world we live in?
This sense of intimacy and family is further developed in Jesus's statement "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." The Father Jesus has spoken of and revealed to us, is not only his. Through the resurrection, we can have the same relationship with God that Jesus did. WOW! How does that impact your understanding of God in your life? Does that give new/different/increased awareness of God's love for you?
Jesus sends Mary to proclaim "I have seen the Lord". Maybe an Easter season practice can be to note the places where we have "seen" the Lord. To note those places in our lives when we have experienced or we have seen someone experience the love, the mercy, the compassion of God.

Commentary for this passage:
Immersion Bible Studies: The Glorification of God

April 8, 2018 – Easter 2

John 20:19-31 - Jesus appears to the Disciples

Thoughts for Reflection:

In last week's gospel, Mary Magdalene "announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'", yet later on that day according to today's scripture, the disciples are in a house with locked doors. They were not celebrating…they were fearful, even though Jesus had told them he would return. It seems no one got it. How do we, as Christians who know that Jesus rose from the dead and brought salvation to all, still live in fear? Still not get it? Still have a hard time believing? Why is that?

Three times we hear the resurrected Jesus say "Peace be with you" in today's reading. It is interesting to note that he is not recorded as using this greeting prior to his resurrection. What does that say to you about the peace he is offering? How could that impact the way we greet each other when we say it in our services? How might that greeting sound hollow to a person living in despair (mental illness, in war situations, unemployed in a recession) and how can we respond? Could this be the case for some parishioners?

Thomas tells his fellow disciples "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 the side, I will not believe." He often gets called doubting Thomas because of this. But in reality, he is just wanting what all the other disciples experienced. He saw Jesus nailed to the cross and die. We can hardly judge him too harshly. We too, sometimes have a hard time believing. As resurrection people, we should be alright in expressing our doubts. Doubts can exist side by side in faith. How many things do we do, uncertain if we are making a difference, uncertain of how God is working in the situation? We continue to reach out in the love of Christ to others, having no guarantees but the promise of our risen Lord that he will bless those who share his love with others. Maybe our people need to hear it is alright to have doubts. Maybe they could benefit from hearing that it is OK and we just keep on going, trusting our loving creator will work all things to good.

Commentary for this passage:
The Way: 40 Days of Reflection - "Some Doubted"

April 15, 2018 – Easter 3

Luke 24:36b-48 - Jesus Again Appears to His Disciples

Thoughts for Reflection:

This is Jesus' third post resurrection appearance in the Gospel of Luke. Here again, we hear Jesus saying "Peace be with you". If you chose to speak of this last week, you could continue, helping people explore those places where they experience/lose sight of/lose hope in that peace. Alternatively, how do we/could we share the peace of Christ with those we encounter?

I love vs 41: "While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering". Again, a point that may have been touched on last week. This could also be applied to theological statements and 'truths' we speak of in church, in our creed, in our profession of faith. Do our people understand and 'believe' 100%? Maybe now is a time to remind them (and ourselves) that even those who were with Jesus for years, heard his story, saw him die and now in are in his resurrected presence…still disbelieved. At least to some degree. And yet the church continued and is present today. They still went out and proclaim the good news. They still went out to "cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and cast out demons" [Matt 10:8]. Disbelief can and does exist alongside faith. It doesn't stop us from the mission of Christ.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." Could/does this quote inform the manner in which we preach or the way we break open the message in vs. 46-47?: "and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations'"

Commentary for this passage:
Abingdon New Testament Commentary

April 22, 2018 – Easter 4

John 10:11-18 - Jesus the Good Shepherd

Thoughts for Reflection:

It should be noted that this text follows the story of the man born blind in John 9. Jesus healed the blind man, and then the people drove the man out of the synagogue. Jesus' "good shepherd" discourse in chapter 10 follows immediately after these events.

"I AM the good shepherd". One of Jesus' many I AM statements begins this pericope. Perhaps take a look at the other I AM statements and how that informs our image of Jesus. Remember also Exodus 3:14 - God said to Moses, "I AM who I AM"
I AM the bread of life (John 6:35)
I AM the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5)
I AM the door for the sheep (John 10:7; 10:9)
I AM the good shepherd (John 10:11; 10:14)
I AM the resurrection and the life (John 11:25)
I AM the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6)
I AM the true vine (John 15:1) - this is in next week's reading
In context of Jesus' discourse with the blind man (John 9:35-38) What does it mean to be gathered into a flock/community? After being excluded from another? To be found and brought into community?

"There is one flock, one shepherd" (vs. 16b): In a society that is constantly trying to confer identity upon us/shape us through advertising and expectations, Jesus is conferring our identity by calling us His sheep. How does it feel to belong because we are loved and for no other reason? What does it mean to call Jesus your good shepherd? How does that feel?

Commentary for this passage:
Abingdon New Testament Commentary

April 29, 2018 – Easter 5

John 15:1-8 - Jesus the True Vine

Thoughts for Reflection:

The term 'abides' appears 8 times in 4 verses in this pericope and will be repeated next week as the reading continues and we learn that abiding in Jesus is abiding in His love. You may want to reflect on these terms and continue next week. What does it mean to abide in something or to have something abide in you?

"Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned" (vs. 6) All too often this scripture is interpreted as applying to us, as a warning. But the gospel of John was written to a community already 'thrown out'. This verse in not one of condemnation but a declaration of life! Jesus is saying that being connected with/abiding in Him, is the way to abundant life! It is a promise not a condemnation. How does that make you feel? How does that impact the way you look at your personal situation?

This reading is very much one about relationship. The vine needs the vine grower as much as the vine grower needs the vine. It is a relationship of interdependence and reliance on each other. They need each other for optimum production and growth. Bearing fruit is dependent on relationship and on belonging and on connection with others. How we bear fruit will be dependent on who we are in relationship with, who we depend on and who are connected to. How does it feel to depend on God/Jesus/others in producing fruit? How does it feel to bear fruit? What kind of fruit do you produce? Is there a tendency to think of dependence as weakness? What does that mean to ministry?

Commentary for this passage:
Abingdon New Testament Commentary