

Lay Preachers' Bulletin – April 2021

April's lectionary notes are provided by The Rev. Brandon Witwer, Assistant Priest, Christ Church Calgary

April 4, 2021 – Easter Sunday
Mark 16:1-8

- This is the original ending of the Gospel of Mark. You will probably find in the footnotes in your Bible that there are a shorter and longer ending added on to the Gospel some time later in the history of the early church. These added endings 'finish' the story and follow the lead of Matthew and Luke in supplying more detail in the resurrection stories. Mark's ending that we read today is really quite abrupt (and doesn't end on the cheeriest note!). This is a brilliant rhetorical and narrative move. The story is left hanging and we're invited to write the rest of it with our lives. How does the story carry on with the resurrected Jesus in our midst? What is it like when we go to Galilee and see him?
- Place is important. We've realized that during the pandemic as we have missed the places that mean so much to us – whether our churches as we've worshiped remotely, or trips cancelled, including visits 'home'. The resurrected Jesus doesn't meet the disciples in Jerusalem – the place of the passion and the place of power and prestige – but back 'home' in Galilee. Jesus comes in weakness as a babe in a manger at Christmas, his throne is a cross, and in his resurrection he chooses to be among a people marginalized both by the oppressing Roman forces, and by the powerful among their own people centred in Jerusalem.
- The women have to wait out the Sabbath before they can perform the last act of care for their beloved friend and rabbi. Their waiting seems short compared to the waiting that many of us have endured through the pandemic as we await the opportunity to offer proper funeral rites for our lost loved ones. But what resources does the women's waiting offer us as

we live with our grief? And what hope does the resurrection speak to us in the midst of this season?

April 11, 2021 – Easter 2

John 20:19-31

- Poor Thomas! One of the great missionaries of the church – bringing the gospel to India where the church still points back to its founding at the preaching of the apostle. But this one story gets him branded “Doubting Thomas.” It might be worth exploring the place of doubt in faith. There will be those who fear doubt. Who need certainty. Sometimes we just need something stable to stand on. But doubt plays an important role in the life of faith. The questions doubt raises can be a wonderful springboard for spiritual growth. Some people will need to be encouraged to follow the questions with courage. They might just find more than they ever hoped for! (To fill out the picture of Thomas in the Gospel of John, check out John 11:16 & 14:5).
- This week and next week’s gospels both have foundational texts for our understanding of the church as missional – a word we’ve been using a lot in the diocese in the last year. The Latin roots of the word mission have to do with sending – to be a missional church is to be a sent church. Here we have Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit on the disciples and sending them *as the Father has sent him*. What does it mean to be sent as the Father has sent Christ? Where is God sending us in our various contexts?
- There is a beautiful moment in John’s gospel here in verse 29 where it’s as if Jesus looks up off the pages of Scripture and addresses us today directly – “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Allow yourself to hear Jesus’ voice speaking directly to you this word of blessing.

- A word of caution when preaching John around Holy Week and Easter. The church historically does not have a good track record in the way we have treated our Jewish neighbours. We must be on our guard with how we use our language because words matter. When John uses the phrase “the Jews” we are morally obligated to note that this does not refer to a whole race or ethnic group, but to a historical and localized group. Some translators prefer “the Judeans” to “the Jews”. Please consider speaking simple words of healing and peace.

April 18, 2021 – Easter 3

Luke 24:36b-48

- In verse 48 again the call to mission, with some new details. The disciples are sent as witnesses – to tell what they have seen. Two questions: 1) what have you seen? Who is Jesus to you? Why do you follow him? 2) Who can you share that with in a way that is authentic and appropriate?
- I love the combination of words in v. 41 – in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering. Let’s not make this a ‘spiritual rule’ but I am fascinated by the experience of joy that comes before understanding. We don’t have to ‘figure it out’ or ‘get it right’ before we can begin to experience the wonder of the mystery of the resurrection that we continue to celebrate this Easter season. The line I’ve heard about the Trinity holds as well for the resurrection – it is not so much a mystery to be solved, but a reality to live into.
- In verse 47 Jesus talks about the proclamation of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. This is such an important part of what Jesus offers. It is hope for healing for those places within us that we cringe at when we catch ourselves acting and thinking in ways that don’t align with our values. The promise of forgiveness opens up a safe space for us to critically reflect on our own failures and faults. That God knows us completely – warts and all – and still loves us is such good news. I like to

talk about repentance as a re-orientation towards God. The focus isn't on 'stop doing bad stuff' and instead on 'look at Jesus and you'll start looking like him'.

April 25, 2021 – Easter 4

John 10:11-18

- Good Shepherd Sunday. These notes are meant to focus on the Gospel or Epistle. Small cheat – don't be afraid to preach Psalm 23! It's so well known and loved and you can do so much with it. Exegetical note: hear "goodness and mercy shall follow me" as "relentlessly chase after me."
- It might be worth asking the question, "Who is the hired hand?" Who is Jesus referring to? (Checking in on Ezekiel 34 might offer some possible suggestions). Who might that person represent today?
- This might be a useful homiletical question, or it might be just for you: What does Jesus' voice sound like? How do you know Jesus is speaking to you? I'll share with you a handy tool I was taught years ago. You've got five fingers – each one a way God might speak: 1. Through Scripture. 2. In quiet, listening prayer. 3. Through others. 4. Through circumstances like open doors. 5. Through your own deep desires. How does God speak to you?