

The Resurrection of Our Lord, Book of Acts, Year A

THE PROMISE OF THE OPEN-MINDED (OPEN-TOMB)

Acts 10:34-43

The Resurrection of Our Lord

Analysis by Michael Hoy

34Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, 35but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 36You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. 37That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: 38how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 39We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; 40but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, 41not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. 43All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Author's Note: The diagnosis that follows, in all its depth, is a necessary precursor to the marvelous and promising sermon of our text; so I recommend reading the whole of chapter 10 when preparing to preach on this text. It may also help keep your sermon from being reduced to moralism, which is hardly Easter at all.

DIAGNOSIS: Closed-Minded

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Practicing Partiality

Peter was quite used to being partial. He had lived his life by it. Devoted himself to it. And so when God gave him a vision of “all kinds of four-footed creatures” and said, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat,” it is no surprise that Peter would balk. “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean” (10:12-14). Partiality, though, is not limited to four-footed creatures. Why, we have the same problems of partiality with the two-footed variety. Don’t kid yourself; even and especially is this religiously- and politically-charged environment.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Deceit

Yet we do kid ourselves, don’t we? We deceive ourselves, as even Peter did, to think what he was doing was the “clean” approach to life. We have no problems seeing the blemishes of others, but we do have problems recognizing our own deep blemish of deceit.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Profane

So when Peter is called out on his deceit (he seemed to have a habit of this also in the Gospel narratives), it is like we ourselves are being called out with him: “What God has called clean you must not call profane.” And then the truth hits! All along we have been clinging to a life of truly theological profanity even in our presumed righteousness and “rightness”!

PROGNOSIS: Open-Minded

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): God Raised Him from the Dead

The One whom God raised from the dead was not partial to some, but came for all. Jesus in his life and ministry would override the legalisms that would prohibit all to whom the promise could

extend; and for that he would become one who suffers from the partiality of being “put to death by hanging him on a tree” (v. 34). Nonetheless, from this death springs life, vindication, and righteousness! “God raised him on the third day” and “ordained [him] as judge of the living and dead.”

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Believing in Him His promising life beyond the tomb of our profane and deadly partiality opens us up to trusting in his promise. And “everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (v. 43). As people to whom he has also appeared to “open our minds” and hearts in the breaking of bread (cf. v. 41; cf. also Luke 24:30-32, 44-48), we get to eat and drink with him proclaiming his death until he comes, trusting in the fullness of his resurrection promise.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Witnessing to Life The word that the Peter of Acts uses to describe the fruits of this new life is “witnesses” (vv. 39, 41). And Peter would come to this greater witness of the immeasurable bounds of God’s grace not only in this sermon but in the one he would later preach before the Council in Jerusalem (11:1-18; 15:7-11). Is Peter going back to his old life of partiality—a leaning toward the law (*opinio legis*)—when he speaks of the God who shows no partiality and how one’s acceptability is measured by being one who “fears him and does what is right” (v. 35)? Or when he says that God “allowed [the risen Jesus] to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses” (v. 41)? I don’t think so, though I can understand how our own *opinio legis* can lead us to misrepresent the greater inclusiveness of Peter’s (Christ’s, really) message about what all entails righteousness and witnessing. But then, again, how powerful is the grace of God to choose not only Peter, with all his foibles, but also you and me and all who hear the liberating and ever-expanding witness of the holy Good News! Christ is risen! He is risen,

indeed! Alleluia!