

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Acts 3:11-15

Easter Sunday
Midway Presbyterian Church
April 17, 2022

The Author of Life

Introduction to the Psalm

Our psalm this Easter Sunday is a thanksgiving hymn of praise for God's goodness and steadfast love. The church celebrating the victory of Christ's resurrection echoes Israel's praise. Listen to these words from Psalm 118:1-2 and 14-24...

Introduction to the New Testament Lesson

At our Sunrise service this morning we heard the angels' question to the women who, after the Sabbath, had come to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus for burial. The question: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" And shortly, the Lord will present himself alive to the apostles. (Acts 1:3)

For Luke, Jesus is "the author of life." In his second volume, Acts of the Apostles, chapter 3, we have Peter's testimony in the temple in Jerusalem. It occurs right after Peter and John were met by a lame beggar while they were going to the temple at the hour of prayer. Looking intently at the man, Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." (Jn. 3:6)

Now, from Solomon's portico, Peter declares to the gathered crowd of Jews, "You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead." They had asked for a murderer—Barabbas—to be released, and they had called for the Author of Life—Jesus Christ—to be crucified. Listen to these words from Acts' 3:11-15...

Sermon

During Lent, we follow Jesus and his disciples on the road to Jerusalem. Last Sunday Christians celebrated Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, but we also recognize that it was the beginning of Jesus' Passion—the last week in his earthly life. Yes, a lot happened in that one week between Palm Sunday and Easter.

On Monday and Tuesday the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders escalated. On Wednesday Judas met with the religious leaders and arranged for Jesus' betrayal. On Thursday Jesus met with his disciples in the Upper Room, he washed their feet, and shared the Last Supper with them. Later that night he was arrested while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Early Friday morning Jesus was tried before Pilate and sentenced to death. By Friday evening Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried. Saturday was a Sabbath day of rest.

And so at last we come to Sunday morning. Only seven days had passed since the triumphal entry, but so much had happened. Imagine how the disciples felt at this moment. They were in shock at the events of Thursday and Friday. They were in mourning over the death of their Lord and friend. And they were hiding in fear for their own lives. Jesus had warned them that the road to Jerusalem was the road to the cross, but somehow, they did not understand. But now Sunday morning had arrived, and everything was about to change.

In Peter's Temple Discourse he declares "you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses." (Acts 3:15) As exemplified in Peter's message, early Christian preaching always stressed the power of the Risen Lord. The healing of the lame beggar was God's doing through the power of the name of Jesus. The disciples never regarded themselves as sources of power but only as channels of power. They were well-aware of the limitations of what they could do. They were also well-aware that there was no limitation to what the Risen Christ could do through them and with them. Therein lies the secret of the

Christian life. The Christian knows that so long as he thinks of what *I* can do and what *I* can be, there can be nothing but failure and frustration and fear; but when we think of “not I, but Christ in me,” there can be nothing but peace and power.

It is the Easter faith, the faith in the risen and living Lord, which makes us able to meet life. “Because he lives, we can face tomorrow. For if we believe that Jesus Christ is risen and living, then we must believe that all life is lived in his presence, that we are never alone, that we are called upon to make no effort, to endure no sorrow, to face no temptation—without him.

This Christological title in Acts 3, “The Author of Life,” means that Jesus was the originator, the founder of life. Hebrews 12:1-2, encourages the people to run the race set before them, “fixing our eyes upon Jesus—the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” In Acts 5 the apostles are instructed by the angel who frees them from prison to go and “speak to all the people all the words of this life.” (v. 20) According to Jesuit priest and former professor, Joseph Fitzmyer, that means they are to proclaim the message of new life in Christ, a life that transcends the ordinary existence of mortal human beings. In the first temptation in the wilderness following his baptism, he quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, “Man does not live by bread alone,” suggesting that there is a life fed by other things than bread.

In his Gospel, John records Jesus’ words:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (14:6)

And in his prologue:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (1:1-5)

Yes, Jesus is the author of life, the author of salvation. A salvation that begins in this life and carries forward into the life of heaven.

Charles Wesley's great hymn that we sang earlier today, "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today," incorporates a number of familiar Easter themes: the completed work of redemption; the empty tomb; the battle with evil fought and won; death overcome; the new life in Christ *now*. The hymn has eleven verses, four of which are in our hymnal. The second verse is:

King of glory! Soul of bliss!
Everlasting life is this,
Thee to know, thy power to prove,
Thus to sing, and thus to love.

Jesus Christ has brought life to millions of people. And the experience of Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 22 and 26) shows how dramatic that change can be. Through the power of Jesus, Paul—a Jew and persecutor of Christians—would become a great evangelist, proclaiming the Gospel of Christ throughout the known world. Yes, Paul's life was changed on that road to Damascus, by the light of Christ, the author of life.

Like the Apostle Paul, St. Augustine's career as a churchman and theologian began with a similar conversion. It's recorded in his classic, the *Confessions*. His conversion in 386 A.D. at the age of 31, came through hearing a child's voice say, "take up and read." He then opened a book of St. Paul's writings at random and read Romans 13:13-14:

Let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

After reading this scripture, St. Augustine said:

I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty, and all the gloom of doubt vanished away.

When Augustine went and told his mother what had happened, she leapt for joy, blessing her Lord who was “able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.” (Eph. 3:20b)

Years ago, I took a class on Narrative Preaching at Columbia Theological Seminary that was taught by Professor of Preaching and Worship, Lucy Rose. I have her book, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*. She was the daughter of a former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., Ben Lacy Rose.

Lucy Rose was married and the mother of an eight-year-old daughter. At age 46, she had a mastectomy and then several weeks of chemotherapy, at the end of which doctors thought they had gotten it all.

But sadly, after two and a half years, they discovered the cancer had returned, had gotten into her bones, and had already begun to spread. Lucy suffered through chemotherapy of a different kind and tried numerous treatments. But none were successful. The cancer spread from her arms to her face, and finally to her lungs and her liver.

In spite of weakness and pain, Lucy Rose insisted on teaching her classes at the Seminary. But at the end of the school year in May, she was confined to her bed at home. Friends and colleagues formed a steady stream of visitors, including Marilyn Washburn, a dear friend and medical doctor who cared for the Seminary community. Dr. Washburn became an angel of mercy, sometimes caring for Lucy ten or twelve hours a day.

Two weeks before she died at age 50, her whole family gathered in Decatur. Lucy’s mind was clear most of the time. She requested the reading of her favorite scriptures, and said again and again, “I’m ready to go.” She sang with the groups who came, “Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home,” and “I’ll Fly Away.”

In a sermon at the funeral of his dear daughter, Ben Lacy Rose said:

Lucy gave a witness which this generation very much needs—a witness which none could give except one who knew she was dying and for whom death had lost its sting. A young woman, a friend of Lucy's said to my wife, "After seeing Lucy die, I'm not afraid of cancer anymore." That is exactly what God intended! And that is what Lucy hoped for. She showed her friends, her students and all the rest of us that with Christ one can face pain and death unafraid because death has no more terror. One night, Lucy roused from sleep and said in a clear voice, "Wow! Look at that!" Was she viewing the New Jerusalem? Who knows? But we do know that for her, death had lost its sting.

My friends, Paul, Augustine, and Lucy Rose, along with many of our loved ones and friends, are now part of that great cloud of witnesses. And the same Jesus Christ who is the author, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith; the same Jesus Christ who brought new life to Paul and Augustine; the same Jesus Christ who enabled Lucy Rose to keep the faith in the face of pain and death; that same Jesus Christ continues to bring new life to people today. It may not be marked by anything as dramatic as the conversion experience of Paul or Augustine, but it is no less a joy to celebrate. A joy to celebrate when we find God's grace sufficient for our every need. When we find his peace guarding our souls in a time of trial or grief.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:1-2)

In the name of the risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.