

“And we are witnesses to these things . . .”

Preaching the Easter Texts

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For a season of Sundays the lectionary dwells in the joy of Easter and invites us to consider what it might mean to live in that joy as post-resurrection people all the time. Easter should have a season. We devote a Wednesday (and indeed a preparatory Tuesday), six Sundays, and a week of holy days to preparing our hearts for the cross. But the resurrection may not always get the time it deserves and the time we need to take it in.

In Britain where I live (and I suspect it is true everywhere), it is far easier for people to accept the way of the cross than it is for them to experience the full joy of the resurrection. No one doubts the reality of serious suffering; it is probably the greatest stumbling block to faith in this context. But abundant life isn't so easy to grasp. And perhaps this was always so. “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile . . .,” Paul writes to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:17, a chapter we consider each year on Easter), who are struggling with the idea of resurrection.

The lectionary gives us space to ponder what it means for us that he has been raised—not just to celebrate the empty tomb and the first appearances, but to think about what comes after that third day. How are we to live as post-resurrection people in the light of Easter? A season with these texts suggests that the surprising, transforming newness of God demonstrated in the resurrection will continue to work in us and through us and for us all along our way, that we are to be his witnesses, that we are intended to be people marked by God's strange, death-defying doings, and that no matter what happens on the way of grace, we are to rejoice truly, madly, deeply. Newness does not mean ease. There are hints of hardship throughout the Easter texts, resistance from without and resistance from within, because God's newness is so unexpected and often so challenging that even the faithful may not immediately embrace it. There are stories of disorientation and sorrow. There are floggings, angry mobs, prison cells. There is death. But these things do not win finally. Transformation, worship, awe, joy, praise, faithfulness, service, love: these win when God's newness is in play. And these texts insist that God's newness is always, always, relentlessly in play.

Although this is a Luke year, we get very little Luke in this season, but in this and every Easter season, we get plenty of Luke's sister book, Acts. This means that the Holy Spirit, who broods over Acts from the first, also hovers over this time, binding Easter to Pentecost. Two of the gospel texts from John join the theme as the Holy Spirit is breathed over Jesus' own with the promise that this other Advocate will teach them and remind them, and us, of all that Jesus has told them.

The Holy Spirit inspires the bold speech (something we see again and again in Acts and in this season, which begins with two speeches by Peter) that characterizes the way of witness to be taken by resurrection people participating in the advance of the word. This does not happen without suffering and conflict, but these do not hinder the expansion of the proclamation or dampen the hopes or weaken the resolve

of the proclaimers. In the face of conflict, against all expectations, they rejoice, they sing, they pray, and they go out to speak the good news again and again.

After death is undone on Easter, and Paul has proclaimed the resurrection to his Corinthian congregation, Revelation carries us over the next six Sundays on waves of worship through visions of transcendent newness. And Psalms of praise also give voice to the season's rejoicing.

John completes the contemplation of Easter life with lessons in love, unity, peace, and abundant, eternal life in the care of the shepherd, who dwells in God's love before time, makes that love present in the world, and prepares his own to live in the same love and be witnesses to it, even and especially in the face of resistance.

Over and over in the season's texts God's newness changes things, gives life, transforms our mourning into dancing. But God's newness is not tame. It does not meet our expectations. It exceeds them. And in doing that, it also overturns them. It is as unsettling as it is ultimately beautiful. It is searing light before which angels fall in worship and humans, like Saul and us, fall down blind, until scales fall from our eyes, and we are able to see the beauty and peace and joy rising up before us like new heavens and a new earth.

Still, like the disciples on Easter evening, who have already heard the good news, we may find ourselves cowering behind closed doors of one kind or another, even after we have been touched by newness and grace. But the Alpha and Omega, who can get through any doors, any fears, any doubts, breaks through and brings us back to life again and again. And the eternal blessing holds us fast.

Easter needs a season to tell us this. The resurrection happened once for all in Jesus, but it happens in us over and over in large and small ways. So we have seven Sundays to soak in the awe and prepare ourselves to set sail with Paul and the others on the way to our vocation of testimony. We have seven Sundays to sit with God's new thing, to watch it work its transforming wonder in the lives of the first believers, to rejoice with the Psalmists, and to sing with the myriads of myriads around the throne of God and of the Lamb.

We have seven Sundays to consider how we will live as resurrection people in the world God loves, we who are witnesses to these things, we who have seen the Lord.

Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 65:17-25; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Luke 24:1-12

Easter Evening: Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 114; 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8; Luke 24:13-49

I have seen the Lord

Alongside a rich choice of gospel texts for Easter Sunday, Acts 10:34-43 is suggested twice; if you don't use it as a first reading, the lectionary tries again on the third. The lectionary really wants us to notice this good news, to make the connection between God's biggest, most unexpected gift of newness in the resurrection of Jesus and God's ongoing work of transformation in us.

We are here in the midst of the giving of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles and Peter's vision-inspired, Spirit-led change of heart. Peter's speech and the context out of which it emerges are marked by transformation, newness, and praise. Peter is surprised by

grace. His expectations are utterly overturned, first in the vision of the unclean food and God's instruction to eat, then in God's work at the home of Cornelius. God's newness prevails over human prejudice and certainty. "I truly understand that God shows no partiality," says Peter (10:34). Pointing back to Jesus' mission, death, and resurrection, grounded in the story of Israel, Peter tells the story of the church (10:41-42): "Chosen by God as witnesses . . . who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He 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." And then, while Peter is still speaking, God does God's gracious work, and the Spirit surprises everyone.

The Isaiah text continues the theme of newness, a newness so large that it can only be contained in new heavens and a new earth. "The former things shall not be remembered or come to mind" (65:17) when our hearts are full of God's future, which starts now, morning by morning. This is cause for great rejoicing among God's people and by God himself (65:19): "No more shall the sound of weeping be heard . . ." All God's people will live good, full lives and will be able to enjoy the fruits of their labors. The animals will live peaceably too. "They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain," says the Lord (65:25).

Paul joins the theme of life – new life in the individual but also new life for the world as God the Father and King reigns, and finally (15:26): "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." The Psalmist too takes up the song of life and witness, rejoicing in God's goodness and enduring steadfast love (118:17): "I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord."

Finally we come to the gospel readings, the ultimate story of death destroyed, tears dried, grief interrupted forever, the unexpected glorious newness of Easter when even the identity of the first witnesses and proclaimers overturns expectations.

In both of the Easter texts, John and Luke, women bear the good news. We aren't told the reaction to Mary's "I have seen the Lord!" in John's account (20:18), but in the following scene, the disciples are huddled fearfully behind closed doors, and they do not immediately recognize Jesus even when he appears among them, and so we can assume that they haven't grasped everything she said.

Luke is explicit. When the women return with the news that Jesus has risen and tell the apostles, "These words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them" (24:11). The word translated *idle tale* is the basis for our word *delirium*. And who can blame any of them? No matter the messenger, that much newness isn't easy to get our minds around. Quite aside from acceptance of the testimony of others, even those who see him themselves find it hard to grasp. Mary believes him to be the gardener (and possibly a body snatcher) until he calls her name.

The Easter evening texts echo the themes of newness, unexpectedness, the strange, death-defying, eye-opening doings of God. Before this God, the Psalmist says, the mountains skip like rams and the hills like lambs. The sea flees. The earth trembles because it understands that this is a God who "turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water" (114:8). Just such a God is needed for the promises of Isaiah to be fulfilled. Of only such a God can it be said that "He will swallow up death forever," as Isaiah proclaims (25:7), and "wipe away the tears from all faces" (25:8).

In the evening gospel text, again, on the road to Emmaus, there is a delay in recognizing God's Easter act. It is too much for any of us to take in fully all at once

(which is why we need a season year after year for every year of the world). Even when he is standing there before them on the way, they, like Mary and the fearful group of followers in John, don't immediately see him. In the inscrutable wisdom of God, Luke tells us that "their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (24:16) until he could open up the full truth for them in the speaking of the word (24:27) and the breaking of the bread (24:30).

"Do this in *remembrance* of me," Jesus had told them at the table (22:19). And the angels say the same to the women at the tomb (24:6): *Remember*. This remembrance is not just recall, but a form of presence. And now that earlier call to remembrance in the breaking of the bread meets this remembering along the way down the dusty road from death. The Easter God who opens eyes and swallows up death and wipes every tear delays their recognition, and in that delay we find our way to him now as they found it then. In the speaking of the word and the breaking of the bread, we meet him. Our eyes are opened. We hear him speak our names.

Then we, like the women and the early bold proclaimers of Acts, become witnesses of these things too, clothed with power from on high. We join Peter and the household of Cornelius, surprised by the unexpectedness of grace, transformed by the strange work of the Spirit so that we too can tell the story of God's big, bright, ever-new, death-defying life.

Second Sunday of Easter

Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 118:14-29 or Psalm 150; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31

That you may have life

We begin this Second Sunday of Easter with another resurrection proclamation, and again the context of the speech in Acts tells the story of the life out of which the testimony emerges. The speech is preceded by an arrest and a miraculous release, after which the apostles are directed by angels back to their teaching in the temple before we reach our passage. Then here we have the proclamation of Jesus exalted by God as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins, and the assurance of Peter and the apostles that the Holy Spirit joins them as witnesses to these things. This inspires murderous rage, held in check by Gamaliel, whose wise words ring through the ages, reminding generation after generation of proclaimers that the very ongoing presence of the story itself and people to keep telling it testifies to the powerful truth of its origins. That is how important the witnesses are, then and now.

Then comes a flogging, but this flogging is not followed by discouragement or retreat, but by more proclamation, redoubled rejoicing. The Psalm for the day, wonderful 150,¹ gives us language with which to recreate their praise because, as the apostles put it (5:32), and we might too, "We are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

The gospel text offers us John's account of the giving of the Spirit.² Here, rather than being poured out and then received as fire and thunder with a cosmopolitan tent revival to follow, the Holy Spirit is given in a breath. Jesus' broken body penetrates locked doors of fear and desperate grief, and the peace-giver breathes the Spirit on his fearful ones.

Then we have the story of the one who wasn't there, the one who voices the doubts

of all the years, Thomas. Jesus comes back for the lost one, who is so marked by the suffering of his Lord that he cannot believe in his rising until he sees the wounds and can put it all together. The resurrection cannot make sense for him until it meets him in his grief.

And Lord knows that there are plenty of us for whom this may be true. So Jesus turns from Thomas and pronounces a blessing on future Thomases who cannot touch his wounded side and scarred hands, a blessing on us, the ones who have not seen and yet will come to believe. The doubter opens up a space for our blessing. And of what does our blessing consist, we who are perhaps just as fearful and closed-in and doubt-marked as those first ones? It is life. That is the last word for this Second Sunday in Easter (20:31): “Life in his name.”

Even as we wait for the one coming with the clouds of Revelation 1:4-8, our Alpha and Omega already breathes life over us in spite of everything. Peace and life and blessing. And we rejoice.

Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 9:1-6, (7-20); Psalm 30; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

So that my soul may praise you and not be silent

The Third Sunday of Easter starts with Saul breathing threats and murder, and then the light and the voice. It is a story of disorientation of the most profound kind: Saul (than whom, we might imagine, no one could be more sure of himself) is turned upside down and shaken. It is also a story of risk for Ananias, who must receive and bless the murderer. And then it is about transformation and, immediately, proclamation. That is where the eye-opening newness of Easter is meant to take us, to a willingness to risk and a passion to proclaim what we know about the risen Son.

Saul falls to the ground as the elders will fall in worship in Revelation. But unlike them, he can see nothing. Ananias laying his hands on him tells him that he is to regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Then something like scales falls from his eyes in a moment of resurrection recognition that is something like what we have seen before in the garden and in the breaking of the bread. And we know that this visual manifestation of release is accompanied by the promised spiritual one because immediately the persecutor begins to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God” (9:20). The Holy Spirit inspires bold speech. Jesus’ resurrection presence in a life compels the one who sees it to tell the story.

But even we, who are surely resurrection folk, struggle fully to take in that we are God’s people, recipients of his grace, and that the world is ever so loved. We cannot fully take it in, and yet we cannot prepare ourselves rightly to share it unless we do find a way to open our hearts and eyes and ears or allow them to be opened by the God who always stands at our door and knocks, and who sometimes just barges in and knocks us over with his powerful grace. The grace that left Saul blinded for three days, that left Jacob with a limp, and Zechariah mute, may also, if we are lucky, overwhelm us with the kind of awe that makes you fall down and worship with the angels and the living creatures and the elders, the myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands.

We may need to be turned upside down at some point (or repeatedly) in order to find that place of praise. The Psalmist finds that mourning, death, weeping, all

of the pain of this life, become precursors for praise. Joy comes with the morning — healing, restoration, life, all emerge from the most hopeless places — “so that my soul may praise you and not be silent” (30:12).

In the gospel passage, seven of them have had a fruitless night on the sea when he appears unexpectedly. After the garden and the Spirit and the blessing, he stands on the shore. And even here, in the daybreak of the resurrection, they do not recognize him at once. Peter is still dealing with past failures by an earlier charcoal fire (18:18, the only other occurrence of the word in the New Testament). The resurrection, even for its first witnesses, has not fixed everything.

It hasn’t fixed it for them or for us. It is just the beginning of God’s work of newness in our lives, unraveling our old fears with love and light — blinding light if necessary — whatever it takes to undo us, turn us around, bring us into an encounter so that he can make us fruitful (153 of them!) and feed us again his resurrection food, and we can learn to love as he loves and to be bold proclaimers of his good news, feeders and tenders of his sheep.

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30

Yea, though I walk through the valley

This Fourth Sunday of Easter begins with the death of a lovely disciple and then with the participation of Peter in God’s ongoing work of undoing death and drying tears.³ Peter, having just been instrumental in the healing of a paralytic in Lydda, is asked to come to Joppa when Tabitha dies. Like Elijah and Elisha before him, Peter prays, and God acts. In the episode before, similarly, Peter tells the paralytic (9:34), “Jesus Christ heals you . . . !” And in each case the act leads to belief in the Lord.

The supreme life-giver chooses to work through human agents. That is part of the wonder of Acts. People who wouldn’t have believed they could do it (who certainly don’t seem all that promising when we meet them in the gospels) are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be God’s agents. It may seem awfully audacious to us, but it is the audacity of faith in the one who has raised Jesus from the dead.

God chooses to dwell with us. In a quiet breath or a mighty wind, we are empowered by the Spirit to be instruments of life. And so we also end up being surprised because we are part of the unexpected. It doesn’t just happen to us and in us; we become instruments of it for God if we can permit ourselves the audacity to go when he calls or, if we are a different sort of person, quiet in ourselves the part that thinks we must or can do it on our own.

Psalm 23 probably tells the story better than any other single passage in scripture, the whole life of faith *en nuce*, starting with the wholeness and safety and nurturing grace of green pastures and still waters. Then we follow on paths of righteousness, the rich ways of vocation, which probably don’t always look so green and still. These paths may be rocky and thorny or dark and muddy, or they may lead by breathtaking waterfalls and oceans, but wherever they lead, he is with us.

And that is a good thing because we, all of us, come to that valley eventually. This is the place where famine and nakedness and sword abide, but it is also the place where ordinary grief and pain can take our breath away. Then the Psalm assures us, and our life of faith tells us, and the Easter season texts breathe the good news over

us again and again, that no matter how dark it seems, the valley is not the end — not for Jesus or Peter or Tabitha or us. Beyond the valley are a table and an overflowing cup.

The Revelation passage pulls it all together. Jesus, the Lamb of God, the one who went through the darkest valley of all — the once-for-all valley of God's great love for the broken world — turns out to be our shepherd, this one who knows the way so well already. And there is more rejoicing, with a multitude that no one could count from every nation.

Finally we reach John 10. Verses from this chapter accompany Psalm 23 every Easter season. This year we are in Jerusalem at a festival, which always signals conflict in John, always points to the valley. But the shepherd is undaunted, his rod and his staff our comfort (10:27-28): "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish." Then the key to all of it: Jesus and the Father, the great giver of life and newness, are one. And he is inviting us into the oneness with them.

Then they try to stone Jesus. The pattern we see played out over and over in Acts starts with him — the life-giving, the bold speech, and then the resistance, which seems ultimately overcome in waves of prayer and praise. The way of the shepherd is not smooth, the paths of righteousness are not always gentle, and we all hit that valley some time. But all of it leads to life — abundant, eternal life — with goodness and mercy in hot pursuit and a home in God forever.

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth

We begin the Fifth Sunday with Part 2 of the story that began on Easter with Peter's speech to the household at Caesarea. Now Peter is back in Jerusalem and under criticism not just for the baptism but even for having visited and eaten with uncircumcised men. The events that formed the context for the Easter speech are recounted again here by Peter: his vision, the three visitors, the journey to Caesarea, the descent of the Spirit, which happens as he is still speaking the words we heard on Easter, and then the baptism of the Gentile household. He concludes (11:17): "If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" This is followed by silence, then acceptance and praise for this God who has done his life-giving thing in unexpected places for unexpected people yet again.

This story is told repeatedly in Acts (as is the story of Paul's conversion, repeated three times in addition to Barnabas' telling of it). In the course of chapters 10 and 11, Cornelius' half of the story is told three times, Peter's twice. Then Peter refers back to the experience again in Acts 15 when the church is still grappling with the issue. And the lectionary gives us two chances on Easter and another one on this Fifth Sunday to engage with it. Resurrection life does not stop at the empty tomb. It touches our lives and our churches. God's strange newness surprises us, reorients us, as it so completely reorients Paul and Peter and that first group of believers again and again. God breaks into our smallness with beautiful Easter grace and changes everything.

The Psalm builds on the praise of the Jerusalem group with an eruption of praise by the whole created world – not just all living, creeping, flying, swimming things, but hail and fire, mountains and hills, sun and moon, fruit trees and all cedars.

Then we come to Revelation's ultimate vision of newness, the holy city descending as a bride and the new heavens and new earth, the end of death, the end of mourning and crying and pain, and the eternal presence of God, drying every tear from our eyes. And the Alpha and Omega of the Second Sunday appears again, giving the water of life.

In the John text, Jesus, glorified, tells his followers how they are to be part of that newness, with his new commandment: Threefold love. As he has loved, we are to love because when we do this, everyone will know whose we are. Everyone will see the sheen of the newness of God on us.

We seem to have come full circle with the return to the new heavens and the new earth and the wiping of tears of the Isaiah 65 Easter passage; the repetition and glad acceptance of the story of the Gentiles, God's big new thing in the earliest church; and praise now extended to the whole created world. And the threefold love commandment has returned us to John 21 and the threefold love question to Peter. If we missed it there, we will not miss the message here that if we love him, we also love each other – we feed his sheep and tell the story. We are his witnesses. Like Peter and the first disciples, we love, we love, we love.

If nothing else, it seems to be the end of the beginning, a fitting place to close the Easter season. But it is not. There are two more weeks of Easter, and the man from Macedonia beckons. We are called on further into this resurrection-charged life. There is no end for us as Easter people, only new beginnings.

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; John 14:23-29 or John 5:1-9

We set sail

Our next Sunday with Acts begins with a vision in the night. The man from Macedonia pleads. God calls us to proclaim the good news, and we set sail.

This is the first of four “we” passages in Acts. While much discussion of these passages has understandably focused on why the author has chosen to switch to the first person plural only in these few places, we as hearers and preachers of the word might especially consider the effect it has on us, particularly in the context of this resurrection season with Acts. And perhaps the effect it has is to draw us in so that we feel ourselves setting sail with them. We feel ourselves called to proclaim the good news in new places and in new ways. We feel ourselves constrained not to do other than follow the Spirit⁴ and compelled to participate in the bold speech and the bold acts of the first Christians.

The immediacy of the passage invites us in, and so we journey with Paul and the others to Philippi. We meet Lydia at the place of prayer. She prevails upon us to stay with her. And we find ourselves nestled in the beginnings of the church family Paul dearly loved, his joy and crown, which will inspire his love song of a letter.

We find our own hearts prepared perhaps to watch for our visions in the night, to listen for the voices that plead, to follow the God who calls us out. And we respond to the Psalmist's call to all the nations, all peoples, all the ends of the earth, to be glad

and sing and praise because if there is anything that Acts also teaches us to practice, it is praise.

Then the Revelation text, which builds on the text for the Fifth Sunday with further description of the holy city in all its beautiful magnificence, invites us to bask in its glory. We notice that here, as in the Psalm and in the journeying of Paul, the nations play a part. The nations will walk in the holy city by the light of the glory of God and the lamp of the Lamb. The gates will never be shut, so that people will bring into it the glory and honor of the nations. And the tree of life along the banks of the crystal river flowing from the throne will produce its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. The holy city is for everyone.

From the gates of pearl and streets of gold, we turn to John 14. Here Jesus promises his own on their last night with him that he and the Father will come and make their home with them. The word translated *home* here is the same one traditionally translated *mansions* in 14:2. As there are many dwelling places in the Father's house and a place is to be prepared for us, so the Father and Son make their dwelling place with us now.

This promise of the abiding presence of God leads to a reiteration of the promise (already made in 14:16-17) of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, to teach and remind Jesus' own of all that he has told them. Then Jesus gives his peace, not as the world gives, and returns to the comfort of the first verse of the chapter (14:1, 27: "Let not your hearts be troubled.") and repeats the assurance that the Son will come back to his own.

It is several ways of saying the same things: John's "God-with-us." The Holy Spirit abiding in us, the Father and Son making their dwelling places with us, the Son returning to us – all are expressions of presence. The shining city of Revelation 21-22 may be our magnificent vision of future hope, but we already have a holy city within us now, a peaceful place of wisdom and love.

As we set sail with Paul and share in the bold speech of resurrection people, as we face beautifully disorienting transformation and holy, unsettling newness, we are not only together with one another (and all of the ones who've gone before) on the journey, we are also together with him. We have a home with the God who is at home with us. And that deep peace settles us. The light that is brighter than day warms us. We are not alone.

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 16:16-34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17:20-26⁵

Even so, come, Lord Jesus

This Acts passage follows directly on the one for the Sixth Sunday, so we are still in Philippi as we begin this story of release (by exorcism from a spiritual imprisonment and by earthquake from a physical one), praise in adversity (Paul and Silas, flogged, imprisoned, and with their feet in stocks, hold a midnight prayer and hymn service for their fellow inmates), and transformation from death to life (as the jailer moves from thoughts of suicide to faith, baptism, hospitality, and much rejoicing). It is an appropriate summation of the resurrection life of the believer: released, rejoicing, transformed.⁶

This rejoicing that closes the Acts passage is echoed throughout the Psalm, with

the whole earth rejoicing and all peoples beholding God's glory. The Psalm is also dappled with righteousness: righteousness and justice are the foundations of God's throne; the heavens proclaim his righteousness; light dawns for the righteous; and God is again proclaimed righteous by the Psalmist.

In the Revelation text, the Alpha and Omega, who has appeared in the Second and Fifth Sundays, appears again. He is our beginning, our middle, and our end in this season and in all our lives as children of the resurrection God. There is also another reference to the tree of life and the city gates, drawing to a close this season of heavenly visions. Then we receive the repeated invitation to come to this one who is the bright and morning star, to live in this city, to take the water of life. And finally an assurance of his coming and an affirmation and hope that it should be so: Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Our final gospel text for the season draws together the love of the Father and Son before time with the lives of believers of every time and with the future of the world. The world does not yet know God (and knowing God and the Son is eternal life, 17:3), but the mutual indwelling of believers with their Father and Brother stands as testimony in the world. God's resurrection life blessing us and binding us to him is also a blessing to the world — a living witness to God's love for it too.

Our Alpha and Omega makes his dwelling place with us. The home of God is among mortals. So we rejoice and we go. We continue the advance of the Word with our own bold speech. We experience in ourselves the life that undoes all that is broken or fearful or closed in us to make way for the new. And we share it. For the sake of the world God loves, we set sail.

Notes

1 Alongside Psalm 150, we are offered the possibility of a reprise of Psalm 118 and its rejoicing (118:23): "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."

2 John's "sober Pentecost," as I once heard Charles Cousar call it in a sermon.

3 This episode leaves Peter at the home of Simon the tanner, where Cornelius will be told to send for him. With Saul in place, the narrative is approaching the mission to the Gentiles.

4 The emphasis on the Spirit is especially clear in the verses that immediately precede these, in which Paul and his company are prevented by the Spirit from going in two other directions.

5 Ascension texts are alternates for this Sunday. These prepare for Pentecost in a straightforward way. I have opted instead to continue the focus on the Easter series as it comes to a glorious close this Sunday.

6 No one says it better than Paul himself writing to his people at Philippi in 4:4-7.