

Third Sunday of Easter (B), APRIL 26, 2009
Acts 3:13-15, 17-19; 1 John 2:1-5a; Lk 24:35-48
Resurrection: Jesus Healing Our Society

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Today's readings continue to proclaim the saving power of the risen Christ. We often identify the power of the risen Jesus with the eternal life Jesus' resurrection promises us. He has risen, so we hope to be raised following our deaths too. Today's readings, however, emphasize an additional aspect of the power of Christ's resurrection. The risen Christ forgives his executors and offers to heal all the violence and injustice of our world. The resurrection of Christ is a promise of social healing.

Our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles is from one of Peter's first sermons in Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection. He accuses the people of Israel—both Jewish leaders and Roman authorities—of sending Jesus to his death. Peter charges: You denied the Holy and Righteous one, and asked that a murderer be released instead. The challenge to the people of Jerusalem is damning: “the author of life you put to death.”

Rowan Williams, the current Anglican archbishop of Canterbury, notes that this language runs through the early sermons of the apostles. In the two chapters of Acts before today's reading, Peter is very blunt: you—both Jewish leaders and lawless gentile Romans—crucified and killed Jesus.

The charge is against the whole city of Jerusalem. You, city of the Roman Empire, are guilty. You, city at the religious center of Israel, made Jesus a victim of your violence.

After these serious charges against the city, what does Peter say about Jerusalem's fate? God is just and promises justice, so we would expect that Jerusalem will be punished severely. But here is the really extraordinary implication of Jesus' resurrection. The justice of God does not demand punishment of the city that put God's Son to death. The resurrection is a radical offer of forgiveness that goes way beyond tit-for-tat retaliation.

Peter says he realizes the people acted out of ignorance, just as Jesus did when he prayed from the cross, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." The response of God to the injustice and violence against Jesus is not retaliation but forgiveness. So in today's gospel, St. Luke tells us that the resurrection means "forgiveness of sins would be preached in Jesus' name." This forgiveness is certainly offered to individual people. But just as it was the city of Jerusalem conspired to kill Jesus, so the city and indeed the whole of society will be forgiven its injustices and healed of its violence. Today's gospel passage tells us that this forgiveness "will be to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

This forgiveness is extended not only to our failures in personal relationships with each other and God, but also to the entire social and political sphere. It extends “to all nations” and the ways they are unjust and violent to each other. Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa reflected on the impact of this gospel on deep effects of racial injustice and violence in his country. He concluded that there can be *No Future without Forgiveness*. This led the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Tutu chaired to work to heal the wounds of racial violence through reconciliation based on truth and forgiveness.

For us, where the injustice and violence of 9-11 has led war and torture, this message has extraordinary relevance. The resurrected Jesus does not seeking retaliation and vengeance against the Jerusalem that killed him. He offers a forgiveness that will bring healing and reconciliation to the city. Jesus’ resurrection invites us to move beyond the tit-for-tat that drives so much of our politics. The risen Christ offers a life healed of the need for retaliation, a life that overcomes all the divisions that separate us from each other and from God. This is truly good news. In the risen Christ, we can be free of the resentments that drive us to try to get even with each other. The resurrection invites us into a healed city, as healed men and women drawn

together in unity and justice. This is good news indeed. We are invited into God's city of life and peace. Let us enter it at our risen Lord's table.

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