

NOTES for PREACHING

Easter Sunday | Doug Beacham

Introduction

This will be a different Easter Sunday for most of us. We will worship from our homes on live-stream or television, or from our vehicles in parking lots. But it will still be Easter, and this remains Holy Week.

There are numerous Biblical texts you can use for Easter Sunday. For this study, I am going to focus on Psalm 16:1-11 (especially vs. 9, 10), and Hosea 13:14. Both these “resurrection” texts are referenced in the New Testament. The New Testament lessons are from the lectionary used by many Christians for this particular Sunday, in particular John 20:1-18 and Acts 10:34-43.ⁱ

Old Testament Background Texts

Psalm 16:1-11 – Key Points

I am using this text because:

- a. It is referenced in the preaching of the early church in Acts 2:27, 31; 13:34-37 (a total of 6 times in Acts, always in the context of preaching).
- b. It reveals something significant about the holiness of Jesus in spirit and body.
- c. It is a powerful way of describing Jesus’ victory over death.

A Messianic psalm of David, Ps 16:1 begins with the Anointed One’s *trust* in God. There is an interesting play on words that begins with the word translated “trust” and the word in verse 10 translated “Holy One.” The Hebrew translated “trust” in the NKJV is *chacah* and denotes a refuge. The LXX translates it as “hope” (*elpizo*, a verb form of the noun *elpis*; the Latin Vulgate translates it as *hope*, from the verb *spero*, to hopeⁱⁱ). Continuing with the play on words in vv. 1 and 10, in verse 10 the title “Holy One” is the Hebrew *chaciyd*, which is similar to *chesed*, “loving-kindness.”ⁱⁱⁱ The word in 16:10 describes one who is kind, faithful, pious, holy, godly. The LXX uses *hosios*, which in the NT is translated “righteous, holy, pious” (see Acts 13:35, which uses the same word).^{iv} My primary point is to show you the poetic sounds and meanings that a Hebrew reader/listener would have recognized between *chacah* (trust) and *chaciyd* (Holy One).

As one reads Psalm 16, one imagines a passage like this ministering to Jesus at special moments in His ministry, such as during the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. In this Psalm, Jesus would have been reminded of His faithfulness to serve His heavenly Father and not be seduced to other gods (v. 4). The language of 16:5 is language that a Levite would use of the Lord being his inheritance, since a priest or Levite had no tribal inheritance. Hebrews 5-8 describes how Jesus, from the tribe of Judah, fulfills the Levitical priestly functions. Jesus, who said of Himself, “the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Matt. 8:20), implies in that statement that His inheritance is not where one would normally expect. Rather, His

inheritance and lot are with His Father and with us, His body. Because of the Father's eternal plan and faithfulness, "the lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yes, I have a good inheritance."

Ps. 16:7, 8 continue the Messianic confidence. It is the Father who gives counsel to His Son. In the night seasons (Gethsemane?) Jesus' heart is instructed. Think of Jesus praying at night (see Luke 6:12). Notice that the Messianic Psalm has the Lord always near the Son, at His right hand—the hand of power and authority.

Ps. 16:9 begins the shift to the primary point of v. 10 and the focus of New Testament preaching. Due to the faithfulness of the Father, the Messiah has confidence in His role and future. Instead of depression and hopelessness (though the Gethsemane episode reveals the reality of Jesus' humanity), a "gladness and rejoicing" that only comes from the Lord Himself becomes the source of the Messiah's strength. Because of that, "My flesh will rest in hope." There is a sense of security, dwelling, the language of "rest in hope." The Hebrew *basar* (as well as the Greek *sarx*) "flesh," in this context indicates the physical make-up of a person, as in "flesh and bones."

Ps 16:10 gives a twofold reason for this hope:

- d. God "will not leave my soul in Sheol." Sheol is the place of death. It's the grave, the pit.
- e. God will not allow His "Holy One" (remember from point 2 above) to see corruption." Corruption is the process of decay and decomposition that occurs to the human body at death. It indicates the power of death and the weakness of the human condition in death. The LXX translates this with *diathora*, a word used in Acts where these passages are quoted.

Psalm 16:11 closes with language that reflects the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The "path of life" indicates a path that overcomes death. Upon His ascension, Jesus is in the presence of the Father, where there "is fullness of joy." And as we know from the New Testament, Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father (Ephesians 1:20; Hebrews 8:1).

Hosea 13:14 – Key Points

1. It's important to remember your Old Testament history as you read Hosea. Following the death of Solomon, the united monarchy that began under David came to an end (1 Kings 11:26 through 12:24). Ten northern tribes formed a new political/religious entity known by several names in the Biblical narratives: Samaria, Israel, Ephraim, all of which describe the Northern Kingdom with its capital in Shechem located in the mountains of Ephraim. The other two tribes in the south, Benjamin and Judah, formed the Southern Kingdom. In the biblical narratives it is usually referred to as Judah, with Jerusalem as the capital.

2. Hosea is dated between 755–714 B.C., which means there is an overlap of prophetic messages with Isaiah and Micah from about 733 B.C. to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. Amos was prior to Hosea and also addressed the Northern Kingdom.
3. Hosea preaches to both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, though the primary message is an announcement of judgement and call to repentance of the Northern Kingdom, variously called Ephraim, Samaria, Israel, in Hosea. Of particular note are the references in Hosea to the “calves” of the Northern Kingdom (Hos. 8:5, 6; 10:5; 13:2).^v These calves were set up by Jeroboam in a clear reference to the worship of Egypt reflected in the episode in the Wilderness described in Exodus 32 and Deuteronomy 9. What makes this episode so compelling is that the turn to these Egyptian idols as the gods who delivered Israel from Egypt in the Exodus, occurs while the Lord God is revealing covenant Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai.
4. Hosea contains at least four clear New Testament references:
 - a. Hosea 6:2, “on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight” – Resurrection.
 - b. Hosea 6:3, “He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth” – Pentecost.
 - c. Hosea 11:1, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son” – compare Matt. 2:15 and the flight into Egypt.
 - d. Hosea 13:14, “I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction!” – see 1 Corinthians 15:55 and the Apostle Paul’s resurrection teaching.
5. Hosea 13:14 is the key verse for our attention at Easter. The reason this text is chosen is because of how the Apostle Paul used it in 1 Corinthians 15:55. The historical context is important here. The rescue from the grave is historically a prophetic promise that Ephraim, the rebellious Northern Kingdom which was taken into Assyrian Captivity, will be saved from death. Whether that salvation occurred in the person of Jesus, or applies to a still to be fulfilled restoration of the lost tribes, or both, is not our primary emphasis at this time. Our primary emphasis is how the Apostle Paul took this text and applied it to the resurrection of Jesus and our resurrection.
6. The opening of this verse in Hebrew literally reads “By My hand I will ransom . . .” The imagery is powerful with the “hand of the Lord” reaching into the grave. The NKJV “grave” is *Sheol* in Hebrew. “Ransom” and “redeem” duplicate the power of the Lord’s hand over death and the grave. In the ultimate power struggle of eternity (the Cross and Death), God determined to have no pity on Satan and his power.

New Testament Texts

John 20:1-18 – Key Points

1. John's account of the resurrection of Jesus is very personal. Notice that it begins with Mary Magdalene going to the tomb in the predawn hours and discovering the stone was removed. She apparently looked inside because she said to Peter and John, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him" (20:2).
2. Peter and John ran to the tomb with John arriving first. They saw the linen cloths in which Jesus' body was wrapped for burial. They then saw the smaller cloth, translated a handkerchief in the NKJV, that had covered Jesus head. It was separate from the linen cloth and properly folded. This is not a sign of people stealing a body and racing away. This is a sign of something done intentionally indicating no rush to hide but a deliberate act.
3. The movement between Peter and John in the tomb is interesting. Though John arrived first at the open tomb, he did not enter. It was Peter who first saw the clothes. Then John entered the tomb, apparently with Peter still inside, and John said that he believed. This belief is contrasted with "they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead" (20:9). That's an odd statement because Jesus repeatedly told them that the Son of Man would be crucified, dead, buried, and rise again. Yet, they did not comprehend the magnitude and meaning of what He told them.
4. John 20:11-18 is a detailed account of the Risen Lord's interaction with Mary Magdalene. Weeping, she first encountered two angelic beings dressed in white. One was sitting where Jesus' head would have been and the other where His feet would have been. She weeps because she still thinks the body has been taken away. The reality of the resurrection had not yet registered in her mind.
5. She turned and saw a figure she did not recognize, but it was Jesus. Was this due to lack of sunlight, or more likely due to the capacity that Jesus had to reveal Himself in His resurrected body to whom He desired and how He desired? This capability of the Risen Lord baffles our understanding of the natural order. The ability of the resurrected body to go through closed doors, to be present but unknown, to eat fish and bread, shows that the new creation describes a reality beyond our normal comprehension. It is worldly and other-worldly at the same time. He can be touched, and not touched at the same time. Jesus is the first fruits of the new creation in which all who believe in Him will share.
6. In John 20:17 Jesus referred to His ascension to His Father. But now, because of His victory over death, the Father is not only His Father but "your" Father.

Acts 10:34-43 – Key Points

1. I mentioned earlier that Psalm 16:10 is cited in Acts 2:27, 31; and 13:34-37. The Acts 2 references are in Peter's first Pentecost sermon. In 2:25-28 Peter specifically quoted the last four verses of Psalm 16. It is important to note that by this time, just 50 days after the resurrection, Peter and the apostles have a clearer understanding of Scripture, having been with Jesus for 40 of those days (see Luke 24:44-49). Keep in mind that Peter's Pentecost sermon is to Jews who have come from across Israel and beyond.

2. The citations of Psalm 16:10 in Acts 13:34-37 are from Paul's message outside the Holy Land. This sermon is in Antioch of Pisidia (central southern coast of modern Turkey) and was given in the synagogue. From 13:42, 43 it is clear that "Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath." Thus, the triumph of Jesus over death through resurrection, and the parallel triumph of His crucified body over death's corruption and decay, brought hope to Jews and Gentiles. Jesus' death and resurrection were the basis for Jew and Gentile coming together to make the "one new man" (Ephesians 2:15).
3. I specifically made reference to these Acts sermons and their audiences because the Acts 10:34-43 passage is Peter's sermon to the Gentile Roman centurion Cornelius. While Psalm 16 is not referenced in this sermon, the reality of Jesus' death by crucifixion (a Roman practice) and the reality of His resurrection are proclaimed. Peter even said that we "ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead" (10:41). A variation of the Great Commission is mentioned by Peter in 10:42, "And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead." The sermon concluded with the declaration that "through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins" (10:43).
4. Almost abruptly, while Peter was still giving his "altar call," the "Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the words." The Gentiles received the gift of the Holy Spirit and spoke "with tongues" and magnified the Lord (10:44-46).

Preaching Thoughts

1. You can use the Psalm 16 and Acts passages to talk about what the resurrected body will be like. In a time when death and decay is near to us through the COVID-19 virus, the certainty that God will not allow death to have the final word is a source of great comfort. Obviously, we need to be careful to not let our imaginations become too fanciful in explaining or describing Jesus or our resurrection. But what the Bible does tell us is very important. I have often used this in preaching and indicated that while He was in the grave, Jesus took the keys from Satan (Revelation 1:18). In discussing why corruption did not touch the crucified and dead body of Jesus, the key point is that Jesus was holy and sinless, yet took all our sins upon Himself.
2. This point can further be discussed in light of Romans 1:1-5 and the connection of Jesus with "the seed of David" and that in His resurrection Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." The Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead and provided the protection of His flesh from the destructive effects of corruption. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2), who is the promise, the down payment, that "He who raised Christ from the death will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11).
3. As an aside, I encourage you to read Romans again but read it in light of the resurrection and the Holy Spirit. Recently I viewed a video presentation about Romans by N.T. Wright where he remarked that if the Reformation had not so focused our attention on justification by faith in Romans, that we actually would think of Romans as a book about the

resurrection and the Holy Spirit. I have personally found that to be a new set of mental and spiritual “eyes” for reading through Romans.

4. Preaching from John 20 can give attention to the process through which someone comes to faith in Christ or grows in their faith in Christ. Remember at this time that people are asking spiritual questions about God, about loss of control, anxiety about the future. We are like Peter, John, and Mary, all of whom know that something has changed but don’t know what it means. We need to hear—as Mary did—Someone call us by name! It means everything to know that the God of who created the universe knows us by name!
5. From Acts 10, focus can be given to the spreading of the gospel message beyond our normal boundaries. Peter had a struggle to even come to Cornelius’s house to preach. But notice that he did not preach about boundaries; he preached about Jesus. The power of “the old, old story” was greater than cultural and ethnic differences.
6. Finally, if you chose to preach from 1 Corinthians 15 and the resurrection body (something you can do in light of Psalm 16:10), you can use the Hosea 13:14 passage where God Himself declares that He is the enemy of personified Death and the Grave. The Apostle Paul took that same language and made it the climax of his message in 1 Corinthians 15. The NKJV language is powerful in this time of fear and death. It is God who declares that “Death, I will be your plagues! Grave, I will be your destruction!” This victory has been won at Easter and is the basis for our hope today. This is why 1 Corinthians 15:58 is the affirmation of our service to Jesus in our day: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” That’s my encouragement for you this Sunday: even with an online service or cars in your parking lot, because Jesus is raised from the dead, your labor this Sunday is not in vain!

ⁱ https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Easter/AEasterPrin_RCL.html.

ⁱⁱ <http://thegrammaroflatin.blogspot.com/2010/06/in-te-domine-speravi.html>. This online Latin grammar indicates that this form and use of the verb means “to be aware of abilities and character.” In other words, the appeal to God is based on what is known of Him and so trust is not blind, but rooted in God’s revelatory acts and our experience. I find this particularly interesting in light of the Messianic tone of this Psalm, and from a theological standpoint, that the Son of God would have known the eternal nature of the Heavenly Father. One further remark, I do not claim to be an expert in Greek, Hebrew, or Latin, so be sure to do your own homework! I know enough to make reasonable assertions, or to be dangerous, or possibly both!

ⁱⁱⁱ These Hebrew words are related, Brown Driver Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968) pp. 338, 339 (hereafter BDB). The BDB comments on p. 339 regarding “Holy One,” that this title denotes the “active practice of *chesed*, kindness.”

^{iv} Hosios is used of Christ in Hebrews 7:26. Used of devout people in Titus 1:8; of “lifting holy hands” in worship in 1 Timothy 2:8.

^v Of particular note is the reference in Hos 13:2 of “kissing the calves.” The idolatry was more than spiritual, it included physical acts acknowledging subservience. Hos 4:16 refers to Israel as a stubborn calf, an intentional play on the idolatrous calves set up by Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:25-33).