

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, April 24,
The Second Sunday of Easter

Festal Evensong
4 p.m.

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A Sermon by
The Rev. Mark Brown
on
Isaiah 53:1-6, 9-12; Luke 24:13-35
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Evensong Sermon for the Second Sunday of Easter, 2022

Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of your love. Amen.

That was a prayer from our Book of Common Prayer—it's based on the reading we heard earlier, where Jesus appears to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Before they realize who he is, Jesus explains the things about himself in *all* the Scriptures--beginning with Moses and the prophets.

The Bible as we think of it didn't exist in Jesus' day. The New Testament, of course, had not yet been written. Synagogues would have had collections of hand-written scrolls in Hebrew. So it's what's in all those scrolls Jesus is referring to. And there are lots of things: histories, laws, prayers, songs, lamentations, theological reflections, prophecies, even erotic love poetry. And stories: some true stories, some stories about the truth. Many different things—but Jesus takes time to explain how he is foreshadowed or prophesied in all of them.

I wonder if he pointed out that his name is all over those scrolls—what we now call the Hebrew Scriptures or the Old Testament. Sometimes his name shows up several times on the same page.

If we stand back to see the big picture, two overarching themes emerge in the Bible. Overarching Theme Number One: victory, triumph, salvation, deliverance--it all comes out in the end. The Hebrew word for victory, triumph, salvation, deliverance—a word that is all over the Hebrew Scriptures-- is yeshua.

Which is also a name: Yeshua becomes Iesous in Greek, Jesus in Spanish, Gesu in Italian--and in English, of course, Jesus. The name Jesus means victory, triumph, salvation, deliverance—all those things. It all comes out in the end (whenever that may be...) And the word—the name--is all over the Hebrew Scriptures.

The stories of victory and deliverance are familiar. The Israelites are led out of bondage in Egypt, through the Red Sea, through the wilderness, and, eventually into the Promised Land.

After years of exile in Babylon, the people return to Jerusalem, where they rebuild the Temple built by Solomon, but destroyed by invaders. The Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, a Psalm says—and it was like a dream! We may go out weeping carrying the seed, but we shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves. Another triumph—another salvation.

And, of course, what we contemplate in Easter: resurrection. Another victory, deliverance from death itself—by Jesus, whose very name means victory, deliverance.

On the first pages of the Bible we read how Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden and burdened with the toil of tilling the ground and with pain in childbirth—and, of course, death. Now they are dust and shall return to dust. The Serpent who tricked them is cursed for his lies and sentenced to slithering on his belly until the end of time.

And on the last pages of the New Testament, the Serpent-- the father of lies, as Jesus calls him-- is cast into the lake of fire, vanquished forever. Death is swallowed up in victory. Truth triumphs over falsehood. Every tear is wiped away. The exiles are gathered into a new city, a New Jerusalem, which needs no light of sun or moon because God himself is the light of the city. And we are God's new tabernacle. This is the final victory, the final triumph of good over evil, of light over darkness, of life itself over death. Yeshua. Jesus. Victory. Deliverance. Salvation. It all comes out in the end.

But. We live in the meantime...and in the meantime, the times can be mean. The suffering, the violence and destruction we see around us can be overwhelming. Besides the heartbreaking scenes of death and destruction resulting from the brutal invasion of Ukraine we could think of any number of disasters: wars, racial strife, genocide, famine, political repression, grinding poverty, forced labor, human trafficking, climate disasters. And, of course, our own personal suffering and the suffering of those we love. So, yes, it all comes out in the end—but we live in the meantime.

Which brings us to the second overarching theme of the Bible: how to live now--in the meantime--which is exactly what the teachings of Jesus are all about.

At the Last Supper, before he leaves them Jesus goes over the basics one more time: just love one another. He calls it a new commandment, but he had said similar things before. You shall love God with your whole being; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. That's how to live in the meantime. Then he shows how it's done: getting down on his knees, he washes their feet. I've given you an example, he says, this is how it's done. This is love in action—this is how to live in the meantime.

Love in action: it can be so ordinary, uncomplicated—even, perhaps, disappointingly simple-minded. And sometimes so difficult! Yet Christ himself—he who called himself “gentle and lowly in heart” --Christ is in and through all our ordinary, daily actions of loving-kindness. He is present to us in every act of loving service, however small, however seemingly insignificant. Even a smile or a hug or a phone call at just the right time.

And these things, too, are victory. The daily variety. Ordinary, garden variety loving-kindness, love in action—the daily victory over hatred, the moment-by-moment triumph over violence and greed and lust for power. To wash someone's feet—literally or figuratively--is the deliverance and salvation, the victory of the meantime.

Yeshua. Jesus. Victor. At the end of time--and in and through all time, even from moment to moment. *“For from him and through him and to him are all things. And to him be the glory forever. Amen.”*