



5th Sunday in Easter 2nd May 2021
Matthew 22:23-33;

Reflection 2 of 2: Do you know the scriptures & the power of God

Faith is the doorway through which we may receive the power of God. The Sadducees did not have faith. They had position. They had status. They had the wisdom of human reason. But they did not have the power of God. They had exchanged the power of God for the power of power. They trusted in themselves. Sadly the way of the Sadducees is still alive in many churches. A 2002 Daily Telegraph survey showed that 2/3rds of then then Anglican clergy did not believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that ½ did not believe that Jesus is who He says He is – the way, the truth & the life the only way to salvation. They read the scripture but did not know it. They read about the power of God but did not know it.

Remember Jesus' words to Martha when she came to meet Him because her brother Lazarus had died. "I am," Jesus said to her. He uses in the Greek the very same words God said to Moses at the burning bush. Ego eime. "I am the God of Abraham. I am the resurrection and the life." And that statement must have its consequences in our hearts and lives. "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever believes in me will never die." Then He asks Martha, "do you believe this?"

As one commentator observes, with that question, history hung in suspense, its future course dependent on Martha's response. Here she stands the practical, pragmatic, house-keeping, activity led sister of Lazarus, and Jesus does not ask her a practical question, as He has asked others, "what do you want me to do for you?" He asks her a faith question: "do you believe in me?" It's a question of trust. "Do you trust me with your brother's life?"

Faith is lived trust. The trust in God that shapes, guides, transfigures our daily living is the gateway between the power of God in heaven and its expression on earth. Without Martha's faith, Jesus could not have raised Lazarus from the dead. One of the amazing things about our Almighty Father is that He chooses to limit what He will do according to our trust in Him. Remember what Matthew tells us in c13, when Jesus in His ministry journeys goes to His own home town. He has gone throughout Galilee teaching, preaching, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. And then He comes to Nazareth, but there, "He did not do many miracles because of the people's lack of faith." They knew Him as the carpenter's son, the son of Mary, the eldest brother of various brothers and

sisters. They saw the Son of God through their human experience, and in that human knowledge they saw Him only as another human being. And they took offence at Him, presumably for claiming to be more than a mere man.

As with the people of His home town, Nazareth, so with His Father's priests in His home town, Jerusalem. The priests saw Him only by the eyes of their human knowledge. In the same way they were not able to believe in resurrection because it is not something that can be explained by human reason. But that fact is the experiential reality of resurrection. Its whole significance lies in the fact that it does not fit human reason. Human reason worked to put Jesus on the cross, but human reason could not raise Him from the grave.

As Peter says on Pentecost Sunday, God raised Jesus to life. God has made Him whom human reason crucified both Lord and Christ. An action so revolutionary that modern Judaism nor Islam nor many simply secular people can believe it today. But when the people God gathered day, heard what Peter and the others declared, they were cut to the heart & cried out, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

When Martha stood before Jesus and He asks her, "do you believe this?", she had the freedom to say, "No. I cant. I want to, but death, is death, the stone has shut him in his tomb." If in her heart and her voice she had said that, Lazarus could not have been raised from his death. Faith in the reason of the world and what we can do in it or through it or faith in God and what He can do in and through us determines what does or does not happen in history.

Martha was able to say, "I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God who was to come into the world." That is the same witness that Peter gives Jesus in Matthew, Mark and Luke. By God's grace, Martha has seen the truth of who Jesus is. Her words express her belief; but the words of belief must live in the actions of belief. When Jesus says "take away the stone," Martha's practicality falters her faith. "But Lord, there will be a stink." Yet Jesus strengthens her faith. "Did I not tell you, that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" Then Martha must have stepped out in trust, authorising the removal, for the stone is taken away. Then all the hopes of her faith fulfilled. And the fears of her human reason die, as her brother comes forth alive.

Faith leads us to repentance, that is to putting our trust in God
Our faith flows in obedience,
that is following the way of God not the way of human reason.
Through faith we experience the glory of God, which in New Testament turns is expressed in the gift of the Holy Spirit.
And in Spirit filled repentant, obedient faith we know the power of God.

Let's go back a thousand years before this event, when the 1st temple is being dedicated by Solomon. Picture the event. The crowds of people. Everyone watching as the ceremony comes to its climax with the Ark of the Covenant being carefully taken into the Most Holy Place. Then the priests and the Levites, to the sound of trumpets, and in choirs of singers, sing "The Lord is good, His love endures for ever." [A Resurrection song] And in that praise the temple was filled with the cloud of the glory of God.

The temple of Solomon and the 2nd temple that Herod re-built, were crafted in dead stones. But now we, by faith, are the temple of God, and are, as Peter says in his first letter, "like living stones, being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. We are God's chosen people, His royal priesthood, His holy nation, a people belonging to Him, that we may declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light."

Faith calls us to repentance. So Peter urges us to abstain from sinful desires. Faith calls us to obedience, so we are to live in ways pleasing to God, that others around us may see our good deeds and glorify God. Those faith-rooted good deeds are the expressions of the power of God, the fruit of the Holy Spirit living within us. Not deeds of human reasons but deeds of God's love, of God's compassion, of God's mercy.

The life and the future of the church is in the hands of the Lord
You are the living stones of the temple in which the Lord dwells
You are God's people, a fellowship of the Holy Spirit and therefore a people who know the power of God. It has touched you for your salvation but it is also within you for the blessing of the people around you. Do you believe this?

Imagine a continuum of faith, a line that runs from one idea to its opposite.
There is life lived in the guidance of human reason
and there is life lived in obedience to God.
There is trust in what man can do
and there is trust in what God can do.
There is the priesthood of the Sadducees
and there is the priesthood of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

According to where the church is, there is its life, its growth, its future.

What we believe about the Lord has consequences
for His life in us and our life in Him.

Do you believe this?