

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Acts 2:14a,22-32

NRSV

Luke has described the coming of the Holy Spirit, a divine intervention in the world, as best he can in human terms: it was “like the rush of a violent wind” (v. 2) and “divided tongues, as of fire” (v. 3). Now Peter, on behalf of the other “eleven” (v. 14) apostles (Matthias has been chosen to replace Judas) has begun interpreting the event to them, “devout Jews from every nation” (v. 5). He has recalled God’s prophecy made through Joel (vv. 17-21): that “in the last days” there will be cosmic signs (including “fire”), then “I [God] will pour out my Spirit”, and then people will “prophesy” (probably *enthusiastically share the faith*) and salvation will be offered to all “who [call] ... on the name of the Lord”. The “last days” are the time of the Church (1:6-8).

Having demonstrated from Joel that the end times are at hand, and therefore salvation is also at hand, Peter now demonstrates how we have access to salvation. First he shows that Jesus is the Messiah, from Psalm 16 (the quotation in vv. 25-28). Jesus, “a man attested ... by God with deeds of power” (v. 22) was turned over by Jews to the Romans to be executed – as part of God’s plan for saving humankind. But God did not “abandon” (v. 27) him (permanently) to death. In the resurrection, Peter sees fulfilment of a prophecy of David that “your Holy One” would not experience “corruption” (or death). David was not speaking about himself because we can see “his tomb” (v. 29) today! So he must have been speaking of Jesus, who was raised from the dead (v. 32). Therefore, Jesus the Messiah gives access to salvation, and the way to be saved is to repent, and be baptised in his name (v. 38). Peter’s sermon is the crux of the message of Acts: the Spirit has been poured out to give power to God’s people; the end times are here; the Messiah has appeared; and a message of salvation must be preached so that those who hear may receive new life in Christ.

Psalm 16

NRSV

The NRSV translation is significantly different from Peter’s quotation in Acts. He quotes the then-current Greek translation loosely (probably from memory); it takes liberties with the Hebrew original. Vv. 1-2 summarize the psalm. The speaker probably *takes refuge* in worship in the Temple; he sees God as *supreme good* (v. 2). He takes the members of the faithful community, “the holy ones” (v. 3) as models for living; he will not worship with those who choose pagan gods – and not even associate with them (v. 4). His fate and his future (“portion and ... cup”, v. 5) are in God’s hands. The author compares his devotion to that of a Levite. For other tribes, there were “boundary lines” (v. 6) between tribal territories in Israel, but Levites received no land; the psalmist’s “chosen portion” (v. 5) is God himself. God gives him “counsel” (v. 7) and deep understanding (“heart”).

God teaches him his ways. Because God supports him, he will not stumble (“be moved”, v. 8) in following godly ways. V. 10 is unclear: it may refer to immortality or just to living a full lifetime. “Forevermore” (v. 11) may be meant literally but is more likely to mean *throughout the rest of my life*.

1 Peter 1:3-9

NRSV

The author has addressed this letter to those “chosen and destined” (v. 2) by the Father and “sanctified” by the Holy Spirit in order “to be obedient to Jesus Christ” and to share in the forgiveness available through Christ’s sacrificial death (v. 2). (“Blessed be ...”, v. 3, is a traditional Jewish prayer form.) The Father, in his mercy, has caused us to be born again (“new birth”, baptism) into a hope which is very much alive, “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”. Our rebirth is also into “an inheritance” (v. 4): in the Old Testament, the inheritance was principally Palestine, but for the Church, it is heavenly. Palestine was lost in war, but our inheritance is “imperishable”, indestructible, free from sin (“undefiled”) and never lost. We, through our trust in God (“faith”, v. 5) are guarded by God’s power – for “salvation” – already accomplished but to be shown to all at the end of time (“last time”). In all of this (v. 6), the readers rejoice even if they have had to suffer “trials” (ostracism or persecution). These verify their faithfulness to God – as the purity of gold is tested by heating it. Such fidelity will be rewarded when Christ comes (to judge) at the end of time (v. 7). Their faith is such that they love him, believe in him and rejoice, even though they (unlike Peter) have never seen him (v. 8). Why? Because they are aware that they are being saved now – this being a logical and temporal goal of trust in God.

John 20:19-31

NRSV

Early on Easter Day, Mary Magdalene has discovered that Jesus’ body is missing from the tomb; the door is open, so it looks as though someone has stolen it (v. 1). She has seen a man standing near the tomb. When he speaks to her, she recognizes him as Jesus. She has told the disciples: “I have seen the Lord” (v. 18).

Later the same day, Jesus joins the disciples, gathered behind locked doors. He shows them that he is the one who was crucified (v. 20). Jesus confers on “the disciples” (not including Thomas, but perhaps a group larger than *the ten*) “peace” (vv. 19, 21) and “the Holy Spirit” (v. 22). As God “breathed” life into Adam, the *proto-human*, so Jesus now breathes the new, spiritual, life of recreated humanity into his followers. Aided by the Spirit, they continue Jesus’ judicial role in the world, forgiving the sins of the faithful and holding others blameworthy (“retain”, v. 23) for their actions. Thomas is expected to believe without having seen, but he demands: *show me the evidence!* (v. 25) The next Sunday, the community gathers again (v. 26). Upon seeing, Thomas makes the most complete affirmation of faith of anyone in the gospel (v. 29). Henceforth the faith of all Christians in all ages will rest on the testimony of the first believers. Vv. 30-31 tell us John’s purpose in writing the book. His eyewitness account is intended to help us, who were not witnesses of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension to “come to believe” and thus “have life in his name”, eternal life.