

**Monday, April 10 – Acts 3:1-10**

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. <sup>2</sup> And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. <sup>3</sup> When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. <sup>4</sup> Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." <sup>5</sup> And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. <sup>6</sup> But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." <sup>7</sup> And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. <sup>8</sup> Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. <sup>9</sup> All the people saw him walking and praising God, <sup>10</sup> and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

**Points of Interest:**

- In our final week, we'll take a quick tour through some interesting moments in the first half of the book of Acts. Acts tells the story of the first followers of Jesus after his death and resurrection, particularly how they developed Jesus-centered faith communities in the middle of the first century A.D. The Franciscan priest Richard Rohr has written, "Outside of your own inner experience of a God who is "merciful, gracious, faithful, forgiving, and steadfast in love most religion will remain merely ritualistic, moralistic, doctrinaire, and unhappy." (*Things Hidden*, 10-11) We'll look at the inner experience and lives of these early followers of Jesus, how life for them was anything but rigid and unhappy. And we'll consider how our own experience of God can continue to inspire a fresh, joyful, and powerful life.
- Peter and John were prominent apprentices of Jesus. In Acts, they and others are now called apostles, which means sent ones. They've been sent by Jesus to be his witnesses, to demonstrate and tell his side of the story of life in Jerusalem, the surrounding countryside, and beyond. They've also been experiencing an unusual sense of God's closeness and power – what they have called being filled with the Holy Spirit.
- Peter and John are heading to the temple for prayer time, as if that's a normal thing to do. That reminds us that the way of Jesus was a renewal movement within Judaism long before a religion named Christianity came to be. Part of the story here is the second generation of Jesus followers increasingly distanced themselves from Judaism, a process that accelerated over the centuries, to tragic effect.
- Isn't it ironic that this highly disabled individual is dropped off to beg each morning at a place known as the Beautiful Gate? I wonder if this was just for his survival or if others profited off of his begging as well.
- As Peter and John walk into the temple, they look intently at the beggar, and in return, the man fixes his attention on them. This reminds me of Jesus and the power of touch – openness to interruption and a healing encounter, being practiced in both directions here.
- Peter practices what social worker friends of mine have called a strength-based approach. Rather than

focusing on what he doesn't have or doesn't want to give (in his case, money), he identifies what he does have to give and can give cheerfully.

- In Peter's case, what he has to give is power-healing. Strange as this might sound like us, Acts reports this kind of spiritual power as pretty freely available to some of the apostles, particularly in the early months of their new storytelling and organizing. Many people have continued to witness physical healing come through prayer, even if it's not usually as rapid or reliable as Peter expects it to be here.
- In case we wonder just how great an event this is in the life of the former beggar, we're told that he jumped up and started leaping and praising God inside the temple. This must have been quite a scene!
- Wonder and amazement become common words in the early chapters of Acts, and understandably so, if you ask me. Some of us might read this scene, though, with something less than wonder and amazement. We might be suspicious of the tale, or intimidated by it. I've had both of these reactions before – dismissive of these miracle stories as well as insecure that I'm not performing them.

I find that both of these reactions sidetrack me from what I'm calling Peter's strength-based, give what you've got from God approach. As I see it, there are many, many ways we can ask for the Spirit of God's help in being joy and wonder and awe-producers in the world. If we'd like to try to do that through prayer for healing in Jesus' name, there are ways to learn to do that with humility and respect and spiritual power. If we'd like to do that through unusually lavish and effective generosity or friendship or artistry or professional competence or you name it, there seem to be many, many ways we can give what we have to others – practicing the power of touch and inviting the Spirit of God to bring joy and wonder through the impact of what we have to give.

**Prayer for our city** – Likely the city you live or work in has many people of obvious or not-so-obvious human need. Pray that God would give individuals and institutions (schools, churches, hospitals, government agencies, elder care facilities, etc.) in your city the power to renew joy in needy people's lives, whether through the means they are expecting it or not.

**Spiritual Exercise** – This week our spiritual exercise will focus on hearing an invitation from the Spirit of God to a joyful life and welcoming the power of the Spirit of God to that end. How would it feel if you were to produce joy, wonder, and amazement through your generosity and work? Talk to God about a way God could help you do that today – perhaps something that feels within your reach, even if it would take some extra boldness and help from God to make it happen. Ask God to give you the power of the Spirit to follow through on what you talk about, and to give power for it to bring you and others much joy.

**Tuesday, April 11 – Acts 4:32-37**

<sup>32</sup> Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. <sup>33</sup> With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. <sup>35</sup> They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. <sup>36</sup> There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"). <sup>37</sup> He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

**Points of Interest:**

- In response to the teaching, enthusiasm, boldness, and public confrontations of the apostles in Jerusalem, thousands have been attracted to a Jesus-centered faith in the early months after Jesus' ascension. Naturally, communities are forming as well. They face scandal and difficulties, but also find tremendous mutual support and encouragement from one another. We pause to look at what the upside was like here.
- At first, the group seems to be living an idealized version of small-scale communism. Depending on your inclinations and experiences, the phrases "no one claimed private ownership" and "everything they owned was held in common" might sound either creepy or appealing. A few differences stand out, though, between this early community and a cult on the one hand or a communist state on the other.

The statement about shared ownership seems more descriptive of a general attitude than literal fact. People are still selling things and sharing the proceeds with the community, so some type of private property persists. There's also shared leadership, not a single, dominant leader. The point seems more about a treasured moment of generous life together than it is about a new and permanent model for religious community. The very next chapter of Acts, in fact, will identify some early problems in this model.

- Other than the generosity, in Barnabas, we see another winsome quality of this early faith community: encouragement. Members of these communities faced significant opposition and misunderstanding, so it helped if they could inspire and encourage one another, as it seems they did.
- This description of community life seems a bit rose-colored and nostalgic to me. Even if it is idealized, though, the basic qualities of generosity and encouragement it attests to would persist in Jesus-centered faith communities for centuries. Our early sources are biased, but consider these two second century descriptions of early churches and their members.
- From "The Epistle to Diognetes" from the early second century: "They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all others; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same

time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death and restored to life. They are poor yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things and yet abound in all; they are dishonored and yet in their very dishonor are glorified.”

- From “The Apology of Tertullian” from the late second century: “On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are . . . not spent on feasts, and drinking-bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck.”

I especially like the bit about looking after shipwreck victims. I wonder how large that need was around the Mediterranean world.

- Here’s a contemporary writer, a historian and sociologist of religion, commenting on the impact of the radical generosity of early Christian communities: “Christianity served as a revitalization movement that arose in response to the misery, chaos, fear, and brutality of life in the urban Greco-Roman world. . . . Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent problems. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachment. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fire, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services. . . . For what they brought was not simply an urban movement, but a new culture capable of making life in Greco-Roman cities more tolerable.” (Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, Princeton University Press, 1996, page 161.)

To me, this sounds timely and appealing and not very much like much of the expression of Christian community in my country and my lifetime.

**Prayer for our six** – Pray that each of your six would experience mutuality and generosity in whatever communities they are part of. Pray that their exposure to Jesus-centered faith communities, however small or large, would include a vision of the love and generosity of Jesus.

**Spiritual Exercise** – This week our spiritual exercise will be focus on hearing an invitation from the Spirit of God to a joyful life and welcoming the power of the Spirit of God to that end. What positive or joyful experience have you had with a faith community? What experiences of joy have you had with the giving or receiving of radical generosity? Ask God to give you the power of the Spirit to be radically generous to others and to accept such generosity when it is freely offered to you. Ask God to also, by the power of God’s Spirit, birth radical generosity and love in whatever faith community you are a part of.

**Wednesday, April 12– Acts 6:1-7**

<sup>1</sup> Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. <sup>2</sup> And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, friends select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, <sup>4</sup> while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” <sup>5</sup> What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. <sup>6</sup> They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

<sup>7</sup> The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

**Points of Interest:**

- As the faith community in Jerusalem grows, their problems gain complexity as well. Jesus told his apprentices to spread the news in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, which in Acts will mean Rome. We’re only at the Judea phase here, but there are lessons in culture and organizational health to be learned already.

There are now Greek-speaking, culturally assimilated Jews (Hellenists) as well as Aramaic-speaking Jews (Hebrews) sharing space in the same community, and as usual in multi-cultural settings, there are some inequities and conflicts that arise. In this case, the destitute widows whose culture and language match the leaders are getting more attention and resources than those who don’t. Leaders tend to favor people in their communities that are most like them, whether or not they mean to. In this case, the overlooked widows speak up.

- Clearly, we’re looking at a successful case study. What goes well here?

First off, the leaders listen. Their reaction to complaint is non-defensive reaction. It’s easy for leaders to take complaints too personally or to dismiss them entirely. One mentor told me that complaint is great if you don’t take it too personally, because it always teaches you something about people and about the system they’re part of. So the leaders listen; they let complaint teach them.

The leaders here also have a non-reactive response. They don’t just dump what they’re doing and start finding more food for the Hellenist widows. Instead, they adapt and restructure. They realize that they can’t stop the work they’re doing, but need to appoint new leaders to important work no one else has been doing.

And lastly, they develop a multi-ethnic leadership team. Apart from their other qualifications, the new cohort of leaders is made up of Jews with Hellenic names, chosen by the Hellenic members of the community themselves. Their own cultural background, we think, matches, the underserved people in their community, which is both just and effective.

- One downside, from my point of view, is that all the leaders selected are men, as are the original twelve apostles that appointed them. The New Testament indicates that Jesus and the first century church were more progressive on women in leadership than anything else going on in their first-century Greco-Roman, second temple Judaic context. But they were still operating in a pretty patriarchal culture and not entirely free of its influence. It's too bad when people today cue off the patriarchy, not the elevation of women.
- Apart from being men, the job prerequisites of these new leaders are good reputation, healthy and potent spirituality, and transferrable skills like wisdom. It's interesting that this first church HR move prioritizes character and hard-to-train transferrable skills over easier-to-train job specific skills, like food distribution.
- New leaders are equipped and empowered and released to do their work with full authority, while the old leaders keep doing the work they've been doing with whole hearts and great skill as well. This seems to be really effective. Team Jesus is thriving in all corners.

**Prayer for your workplace** – Call to mind your place of employment. If you're not working at a job right now, think of any other organization you are part of that has leaders and systems – your church, your extended family, your school, your government, somewhere you volunteer. Pray that leaders there will be non-defensive, proactive, and wise about responding to complaints and concerns, particularly from people of less privilege. If you have a leadership position, pray all this for yourself as well.

**Spiritual Exercise** – This week our spiritual exercise will focus on hearing an invitation from the Spirit of God to a joyful life and welcoming the power of the Spirit of God to that end. How would being part of a healthy, growing organization bring joy to you today? Is there any wisdom God can share with you today that might help? Any people of wisdom you might want to pay more attention to? Ask God to give you and others the power to lead wisely and to bless and empower any choices you and others make to be responsive leaders.

**Thursday, April 13– Acts 10:1-20, 34-38**

**10** In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. <sup>2</sup> He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. <sup>3</sup> One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius." <sup>4</sup> He stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" He answered, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. <sup>5</sup> Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; <sup>6</sup> he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside." <sup>7</sup> When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, <sup>8</sup> and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

<sup>9</sup> About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. <sup>10</sup> He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. <sup>11</sup> He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. <sup>12</sup> In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. <sup>13</sup> Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." <sup>14</sup> But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." <sup>15</sup> The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." <sup>16</sup> This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

<sup>17</sup> Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate. <sup>18</sup> They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. <sup>19</sup> While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Look, three men are searching for you. <sup>20</sup> Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them."

*... Peter greets the messengers, and after having them stay in his home overnight, travels with them to Cornelius' household. There, Cornelius tells Peter why he sent for him, and Peter realizes that his vision about the animals applies especially to people – that though his religious culture fears outsiders, he shouldn't call anyone unclean. ....*

<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. <sup>36</sup> You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup> That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. <sup>39</sup> We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; <sup>40</sup> but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

<sup>44</sup> While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. <sup>45</sup> The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, <sup>46</sup> for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, <sup>47</sup> "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" <sup>48</sup> So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

**Points of Interest:**

- Peter has been the hero of the early chapters of Acts. In this series of events, though, Cornelius is the most

impressive character and Peter occupies the humble position of a learner. The best leaders continue to adapt, learn, and grow, as do the best followers of Jesus.

- Cornelius being a Gentile captain of a 100-soldier Roman division would have made him suspect in the eyes of first century Jews and Christians alike. Our author tells us he was actually a good guy. (However disgusted we might be by slavery, Cornelius' slave ownership wouldn't have ruined his reputation with Acts' original audience – most high status Romans owned slaves.) Cornelius was also a God-fearer; God-fearers were non-Jews who didn't convert to Judaism but respected or even worshipped the God of the Jews.
- Cornelius and Peter both have strange and vivid afternoon times of prayer. God gets Cornelius' attention, and Cornelius acts on the vision he gets during prayer. The next day, a hungry Peter dreams of God trying to get him to eat all kinds of food that God's law commanded him not to eat. What was *that* about?
- Well, God can apparently change God's law. I like that the voice – presumably from God – blames Peter for calling these animals unclean or profane, when Peter didn't exactly make that idea up himself. It comes from the Levitical holiness codes in the Bible that themselves divide all kinds of things – food included – into sacred and profane, clean and unclean. God's either had a change of heart on this, or the purpose of this division was time and culture bound and is no longer relevant. Peter's understandably confused when he answers his doorbell with his vision in mind.
- In hearing that at that very moment there are Gentile God-fearers looking for him to teach them about God, Peter realizes the point of his vision. As much as it's about animals, it's even more about people. God's including all people, all cultures, all tribes in God's family, on equal footing. This is a central, lynchpin insight in the book of Acts, one that Peter and most early Jesus followers didn't see coming, and one they had a hard time learning as well.
- In the moment, though, Peter gets it. He enters Cornelius' household, tells them they too can be accepted by God, and gives them a summary of the life and good news of Jesus. Jesus is impressive, Jesus died and then beat death, God put Jesus in charge of all things, and Jesus offers forgiveness and peace.
- As evidence of their inclusion in God's family, Cornelius' household experiences the filling of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps, given the historic significance of their new faith, it helped them and Peter that the Holy Spirit's presence was so physically and spiritually obvious to everybody.

**Prayer for our six** – Perhaps some of your six have had spiritual interest or interest in God but haven't been attracted to a particularly Christian expression of faith, or have felt excluded or distanced from what they know of Jesus-centered faith. If so, pray that God would communicate the good news of their inclusion in God's family. Pray that each of them, to whatever extent they respect God, would have their faith become deeper and more personal.

**Spiritual Exercise** – This week our spiritual exercise will focus on hearing an invitation from the Spirit of God to a joyful life and welcoming the power of the Spirit of God to that end. What joy would you experience if you had the opportunity to show someone else they can be accepted and known by God, and fully included in God's family? Pray that the Spirit of God gives you power to have this experience.

Additionally, are there any particular people or people groups that your own faith or religious heritage has taught you to believe are unacceptable to God? Ask God if there are any ways you need to adapt and learn and grow in your understanding of God's family.

**Friday, April 14– Acts 12:1-19**

<sup>12</sup> About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. <sup>2</sup> He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. <sup>3</sup> After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.) <sup>4</sup> When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. <sup>5</sup> While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him.

<sup>6</sup> The very night before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. <sup>7</sup> Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, “Get up quickly.” And the chains fell off his wrists. <sup>8</sup> The angel said to him, “Fasten your belt and put on your sandals.” He did so. Then he said to him, “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.” <sup>9</sup> Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening with the angel’s help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. <sup>10</sup> After they had passed the first and the second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went outside and walked along a lane, when suddenly the angel left him. <sup>11</sup> Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.”

<sup>12</sup> As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many had gathered and were praying. <sup>13</sup> When he knocked at the outer gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. <sup>14</sup> On recognizing Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the gate, she ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate. <sup>15</sup> They said to her, “You are out of your mind!” But she insisted that it was so. They said, “It is his angel.” <sup>16</sup> Meanwhile Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the gate, they saw him and were amazed. <sup>17</sup> He motioned to them with his hand to be silent, and described for them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he added, “Tell this to James and to the believers.” Then he left and went to another place.

<sup>18</sup> When morning came, there was no small commotion among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. <sup>19</sup> When Herod had searched for him and could not find him, he examined the guards and ordered them to be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.

**Points of Interest:**

- There’s a lot happening in this section, much of it brutal and challenging from the perspective of the faith community. The King Herod in this chapter is Herod Agrippa, grandson of the tyrannical Herod the Great and both brother-in-law and nephew (don’t ask) to Herod Antipas, who was complicit in the deaths of Jesus and John the Baptist.
- Murder and tyranny run in the family, and this Herod is suppressing followers of Jesus, executing the James that was in the original company of twelve apostles, and imprisoning Peter, another one of the twelve.

- One more contextual note: Jews are mentioned a couple of times in this passage. Our author's language isn't particularly precise. Everyone in the passage (angel maybe aside) is Jewish. Herod is a Jewish government official in bed with the Roman oppressors. Peter and his friends and supporters (including the dead James and the living James, Jesus' biological brother who was leader of the church in Jerusalem) are all Jewish followers of Jesus. And the people the author calls Jews are the majority Jewish culture in and around Rome, Jews that don't follow Jesus and aren't interested in spiritual sects that distract from their hope of getting the Roman government off their backs.
- Peter's Jedi-like, angel-assisted prison break is nothing short of miraculous. It's the big and hard-to-imagine, so-good-you-had-to-be-there-to-believe-it event at the center of this account. Even Peter finds it hard to believe at first
- I love the very personal window into this first cohort of Jewish followers of Jesus that included Peter, both Jameses, all the Marys, and the overjoyed but also confused and overwhelmed maid named Rhoda. They seem like they live dramatic and unpredictable lives in these first years of the establishment of a Jesus-centered faith community in Jerusalem.
- Peter and friends have a really interesting perspective. They live under the ultimate rule of one of the world's largest ever imperial powers, Rome, one that just a few years ago had crucified their teacher and God-in-the-flesh, Jesus. They're now being persecuted by a sellout of their own ethnicity, the brutal and corrupt and unpredictable Herod. One of their leaders has been executed by Herod and another has just escaped imprisonment. But with each great thing they see God doing, they rejoice and are encouraged. They seem to be really focused on the good they see God doing, rather than all the bad in the world that God doesn't seem to be doing anything about, at least from their perspective.

**Prayer for your church** – Pray that you and others in your church would cultivate the attitude this community had, not ignorant to the corruption and brutality of the world and many of its leaders, but also not focused on it as your primary reality. Ask God for help to see every good thing God is doing and to celebrate each bit of that whole-heartedly.

**Spiritual Exercise** – This week our spiritual exercise will focus on hearing an invitation from the Spirit of God to a joyful life and welcoming the power of the Spirit of God to that end. What good has God done in your life, in your faith community, or in the world in recent days, as far as you can tell? Take some time to thank God for that and to celebrate it. Ask God to do more good and surprising things in your life and in and around your church, and ask for power to notice and celebrate this.

**Saturday, April 15 – Selah (Review)**

Taking our cue from the Psalms' interlude moments of rest and meditation, we are practicing a weekly pause in our Bible guide. Today, our 40 Days of Faith is over.

How has this season gone for you?

Take some time to think about or write down anything you have learned or that has gone well. Particularly pay attention to any prayers God may have answered for you or others, or any ways you have experienced God as more personal, more communicative, or more real and present to you. Take some time to thank God.

Afterwards, notice or write down any disappointments you have as this season comes to a close. Are there unanswered prayers or unfulfilled expectations you need to come to terms with, at least for now. Be honest with yourself and God about those.

Finally, in the upcoming Easter season, what practices or habits from the 40 Days would you like to continue? Consider personal prayers and spiritual exercises, praying for your six, Bible reading, or participating deeply in spiritual community. Which of those would you like to continue in the weeks to come, and how? Are there any new spiritual practices or things you'd like to try or to commit to in the weeks to come? Ask God for leading or vision in the season to come.

Thanks for journeying through! If you have a story you'd like to share about this season, I'd love to hear it. Send a note to me at [steve@reservoirchurch.org](mailto:steve@reservoirchurch.org).