



WEEK SIX: Psalm 68; Numbers 10:35-36

Eastertide The Resurrection Life: A Brief Introduction

In the church calendar, Easter (or Eastertide) continues until Pentecost (seven weeks after Easter, May 24). It is a period in which Christians are encouraged to reflect on the joy, transformation, and celebration of the resurrection.

During this series we will be following the lectionary readings (The lectionary is a three-year cycle of readings with four readings assigned to each Sunday; one from the gospels, one from the epistles, one from the psalms, and, usually, one from another part of the Old Testament.). The preachers each week will choose one or more of the texts as the basis of the reflections on the resurrection life.

The lectionary readings for this series are in the table below. If you would like more information you can use the following link to learn more: <https://uniting.church/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/2025-6-YearA-UCA-Lectionary.pdf>

Date	First Reading	Psalm	Second Reading	Gospel
April 12	Acts 2:14a, 22-32	Psalm 16	1 Peter 1:3-9	John 20:19-31
April 19	Acts 2:14a, 36-41	Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19	1 Peter 1:17-23	Luke 24:13-35
April 26	Acts 2:42-47	Psalm 23	1 Peter 2:19-25	John 10:1-10
May 3	Acts 7:55-60	Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16	1 Peter 2:1-10	John 14:1-14
May 10	Acts 17:22-31	Psalm 66:8-20	1 Peter 3:13-22	John 14:15-21
May 17	Acts 1:6-14	Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35	1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11	John 17:1-11
May 24	Acts 2:1-21 OR Numbers 11:24-30	Psalm 104:24-34, 35b	1 Corinthians 12:3b-13 OR Acts 2:1-21	John 20:19-23 OR 7:37-39

Sermon Outline:

A Brief Overview of This Week's Sermon

Key Text(s): Psalm 68; Numbers 10:35-36

Psalm 68 begins with a particular retelling of a period of Israel's history. The psalm's opening stanza – "May God arise, may his enemies be scattered" – echoes Numbers 10:35. In that passage, the people of Israel, who have been at Mount Sinai for a year (they celebrate the 2nd Passover in Numbers 9) are finally departing for the Promised Land. A great deal has changed since the people left Egypt. Most significantly, at Mount Sinai the Lord had invited them into a covenant relationship with himself. (Remember, a covenant is a relationship with purpose.) They were marching out as the Lord's people (the simplest description of their covenant with the Lord was that he would be their God and they would be his people).

The symbol of their new relationship was the tabernacle; an elaborate tent that functioned as a travelling temple. Erected in the middle of the camp (Numbers 2:1) it represented the Lord's presence in their midst (Exodus 25:8). The tabernacle, when it was set up, formed a courtyard in which the bronze altar of sacrifice and basins for washing. Within the courtyard was an enclosed tent that led first to the Holy Place, where the gold lampstand, golden altar of incense, and the table for the bread of the presence stood, and then to the Most Holy Place. It was here that the ark of the covenant stood – a gold-covered box in which the tablets of the covenant were held. The ark represented the very throne of God and it was the ark that led the people as they departed Sinai.

Numbers 10 provides the organisation of their departure – tribe by tribe – and includes Moses' "travel prayer".

"Whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Rise up Lord! May your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you."

Whenever it came to rest, he said,

"Return, Lord, to the countless thousands of Israel."

Psalm 68 opens with a clear echo of this travel prayer and, in verse 10, the first section of the psalm, ends with a similar theme to the second part of Moses' prayer, "You gave abundant showers, O God; you refreshed your weary inheritance. Your people settled in it, and from your bounty, God, you provided for the poor." (68:10)

The psalmist repurposes Moses' prayer for God's protection in travel and in rest to describe their entire journey from Sinai to the Promised Land (68:7-8).

It is, however, a very particular telling of the story for the psalmist focuses on the activity of the Lord alone. There is no reference to the immediate and multiple examples of Israel's grumbling against the Lord, his provision, and his ability to lead them to the Promised Land (see Numbers 11-14). The psalmist is not trying to whitewash the people's failures but is highlighting that God's plans and purposes depend entirely on him and are not threatened by the failures of his people.

Psalm 68:11-31 does a similar thing. There is a shift from the past to the psalmist's present in verse 11 (notice the change of verbs tenses from the past to the present). There is another procession, though this time to the sanctuary in Jerusalem, and the main theme is the surpassing greatness of God's reign and rule. Once again, there is something missing – there is no reference to the king (see Psalm 2 for an example of how God's rule is represented by the earthly king). This is all about God: his plans, his purposes, his rule, his power. The Lord's people are significantly sidelined in the psalm. However, this doesn't mean that there is nothing for them to do.

The psalm ends with a call to praise. While this inevitably had a liturgical application (actually singing praises to the Lord in the temple) there is more to praise than singing. We praise that which we want to see emulated by others. The parent who praises a child's willingness to share is indicating the kind of behaviour they would like to see by the child's siblings. A coach's praise of a player is meant to reinforce the kind of behaviour they would like their teammates to imitate. We quickly learn the kind of behaviour that is expected in a workplace from what is praised. When we praise the Lord we are describing the kind of behaviour we want to emulate.

The difficulty with this psalm is that it is focused on the Lord – almost to the exclusion of his people – and his actions as the Divine Warrior. Scattering his enemies (v. 1), condemning the rebellious (v. 6b), gathering tribute (vv. 18, 29-30) and plunder from his enemies (v. 12), taking captives (v. 18a), and receiving surrenders (v. 31). If this what we are meant to emulate?

The answer is quite clearly, 'No.' This is the Lord's activity, not ours. We are not able to scatter our enemies or crush the rebellious. This was true for the psalmist and is equally true for those of us who follow Jesus. He has done what only he could have done – conquered sin and death, sending the Spirit, enthroned at the right hand of the Father, able to give new life, adoption, and light. This is not our task!

So, what can we emulate? We not be able to 'rule' like the Lord 'rules', but we can participate in the culture of the kingdom. In verse 5 we have a remarkable statement, "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling." Remember the context of Numbers 10. The Lord's holy dwelling is the Most Holy Place, enthroned between the cherubim, leading his people. And yet, in that Most Holy Place we find compassion and mercy and love. The Divine Warrior will bring about universal justice and right but also care for those in need.

And this is where we can enter into the story and imitate God. We may not be able to bring about justice in the world. We may not be able to deal with sin and death. We may not be able to bring transformation. We can care for the fatherless and the widow. In so doing, we become like the One we worship and praise. **Questions to Ask**

1. What stands out to you most in Psalm 68's picture of God as both powerful and compassionate?
2. Why do you think the psalm focuses so strongly on God's actions rather than Israel's failures or achievements?
3. What does it mean for us to praise God in a way that goes beyond singing and shapes the kind of lives we live?
4. The sermon says there are things only God can do, and other things we are invited to imitate. How do we discern the difference?
5. How does the description of God as "a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows" challenge the way we live as followers of Jesus?
6. What is one practical way we can reflect God's compassion and care for vulnerable people this week?

A Prayer to Pray

The projects we hear about during May Mission Month highlight the need for the Divine Warrior to 'scatter his enemies' but also provides us a chance to emulate his compassion. Pray that God would bring about justice, peace, and transformation in the world and that we, as his people, might respond with faith and praise to provide for those in need.

Also, continue to pray for the those participating in Alpha. We ended up with over thirty people registering! Pray that the Spirit would be at work in each participant and for the empowerment of the facilitators.

A Practice to Try

Select one of the things you identified in Question 6 above to intentionally practice this week.

Readings to Read This Week

Read the remaining texts from the lectionary and reflect on how they interact with each other on the themes of the resurrection life (see the Table above).

A Mission Commitment to Reflect on

As we enter into May Mission Month we have an opportunity to be Big-Hearted in our financial support of our projects. In uncertain times we can easily allow fear and anxiety to constrict our generosity. This year my prayer is that we will demonstrate our trust in the God who provides as we courageously respond to God's invitation to participate with him in the work he is doing through our partners.

A GBC Initiative to Promote/Celebrate

Each week we will provide you with a key aspect of our community news that we would encourage you to remind your Life Group about.

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This coming Sunday, May 10, we continue May Mission Month. This is an opportunity to financially support the work of God around the world. We encourage people to participate in this appeal – our target this year is a little over \$200,000 – and to give over and above other financial giving. Please encourage your group to begin to prayerfully consider how God may be inviting them to participate in His work around the world.