

Sermon, Easter 7C (May 24 2020)

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Once again, this week, I'm struck by how RELEVANT the appointed scripture readings for this Sunday seem to our current life & faith and struggles...maybe that's because while the specific CONTENT might vary, the fundamental SHAPE of human life and faith and struggles---are the same in every generation.

1) INTRO: PROTECTION (GOSPEL--How fitting, right?)

2) BODY: (The Epistle 1st Peter--also fitting, right?)

a) Read Scripture

b) Danger and anxiety and suffering are part of the Christian life...in fact they are part of ANY life

c) Of course, the identified source and focus of the danger and anxiety is always shifting... from community to community and time to time

i) THEN: Image: Martyrs

ii) For the original audience of today's epistle, the principle source of danger, the "roaring lion" that prowled around looking for someone to devour, probably sounded a lot like persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire

iii) NOW: Image: Virus

iv) For many of us Today, the "roaring lion" that prowls around looking for someone to devour probably sounds a lot like the corona virus (scientific hoaxes and government overreach)

v) **DON'T GET ME WRONG: THESE DANGERS ARE REAL:**

(1) Persecution and loss of life by Christians at the hands of the Roman Empire was real.

(2) There ARE times when government overreaches, and the media circulates “fake news” .Physical and Economic Suffering, loss of jobs and loss of life due to the coronavirus, among people of every race and religion in the world today is real.

(3) But the apparent adversary is not always the greatest adversary. Jesus prays for God to protect his followers...not from governments, or misinformation, not from anxiety, not from persecution, not from sickness, or suffering, or even death,...Jesus prays for God to protect his followers from separation...from alienation...for disunity!

(a) Image: Bible Verse: “*Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.*”

(b) Gordon McClellan: “...perhaps the greatest form of violence the devil can render is to separate people from one another--that is, for people to forget or abandon this notion of our connectionality, of being united with all Christians around the world in our struggles, triumphs, joys, and fears.”

vi) Unity

(1) How do we say “yes” to the gift of connectedness and unity that (in one sense) is ALREADY ours (like schoolteachers say in school the A is “yours to lose”)...Unity & Connection God’s gift to us in Creation, God’s gift to us in Baptism, God’s gift to us in answer to the prayer of Jesus

(2) How do we embody it?

(3) How do we enact it?

(4) How do we experience it?

(a) In the World

(b) In our country, and state, and city, and community

(c) In church

(d) In our families

(e) Among Christians

(i) Pilgrimage for Unity

(f) *****At St. Mark’s*****

(g) **At St. Mark's....**

(i) “Before”: We worship, fellowship, and learn all together

(ii) Forseeable future, that’s NOT how we are going to embody, enact, experience UNITY? To some extent, you already know the answer, because you’re already doing it....

1. SLIDES/EXAMPLES

(iii) But there are always MORE ways we can say “yes” to the gift of connection that God wants for us....

1. What are the ways you are already saying “yes” to connection?

2. What are the new ways you’re being invited to say “yes” to connection?

3. What is your next best step towards embodying and experiencing more fully and deeply the connection and unity to which God is calling all of us?

3) CONCLUSION: (Acts: Also fitting, right?)

a) Image: Question Mark? Calendar?

b) THEN: Apostles anxious and uncertain and impatient for the future.

Apostle's questions: In Acts, the disciples ask Jesus: "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

c) NOW: We feel anxious and uncertain and impatient for the future.

Our question: **When will this pandemic be over??? When will we have effective therapeutics? When will we have a vaccine? When will we have herd immunity? When will I get sick? When will I get well? When will schools be open? When will church be open? When will life get back to normal?**

d) The CONTENT of questions are different, but Jesus' answer is the same:

i) What is not certain is the time:

(1) **Acts:** *"It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.*

ii) What IS certain is this:

(1) *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth."*

4) CLOSING PRAYER