

EASTER 3

MAY 1, 2022

ACTS 9: 1-20

REVELATION 5:11-14

JOHN 21: 1-19

GRACE AND PEACE TO YOU ... FOR CHRIST IS RISEN... CHRIST IS RISEN INDEED..

TODAY WE GATHER AGAIN TO BE ENGAGED BY EASTER PROMISES ...PROMISES THAT ENLIVEN, GUARD AND SUSTAIN US AS WE LIVE IN THIS TOXIC CULTURE. A CULTURE WHICH CONSISTANTLY SEEKS TO UNDERMINE OUR LIFE-GIVING RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD, WITH EACH OTHER, WITH NEIGHBOR, STRANGER AND THE VERY CREATION ITSELF.

LIVING AMONGST THE SHADOWS OF THIS WORLD WE ARE IN CONSTANT NEED OF THE EASTERING COUNTER NARRATIVE THAT REFUSES TO BE SILENT IN THE FACE OF DISCORD, DIVISION, AND DEATH. WE ARE IN NEED OF THE COUNTER NARRATIVE WHICH REJECTS ANY NOTION THAT DEATH HAS THE LAST WORD TO BE SPOKEN OVER OUR LIVES..

TODAY, THE EASTERING TEXTS TAKE US TO VARIED GEOGRAPHIES ... SOME FAMILIAR AND SOME NOT... WE GO TO A ROAD ON THE WAY TO DAMASCUS... AND THEN TO A HEAVENLY VISION ON THE ISLAND OF PATMOS AND... THEN AGAIN TO A LAKE SIDE BEACH ON THAT SOMEWHAT FAMILIAR SEA OF GALILEE

ON THE WAY TO DAMACUS ...WE ENCOUNTER SAUL... A **PERSECUTOR** OF THE CHURCH ... BREATHING THREATS AND OVERSEEING EXECUTIONS AS HE TRYS TO KEEP THE LID ON THE WHOLE EASTER THING... WHICH SEEMS TO HIM LESS LIKE A RESURRECTION AND MORE LIKE AN INSURRECTION...

BUT THEN ON THAT ROAD... COMES AN EASTER EVENT.. AN EVENT OF BLINDING LIGHT; A VOICE FROM HEAVEN; AND THEN LATER, THE PRAYERS OF A SMALL GROUP OF BELIEVERS.. ...

THIS EASTER INTRUSION AT DAMASCUS BRINGS FORTH A NEW THING.. NOT REALLY A CONVERSION TO A NEW RELIGION AS MUCH AS IT IS A CONVERSION TO A WILDLY EXPANSIVE, PRODIGAL, FAR REACHING UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S GRACE.. A GRACE THAT IS BEYOND CALCULATION AND CERTAINLY A GRACE BYOND IMAGINATION..

OFFERED TO SAUL SOON TO BE **PAUL** IT IS A RADICAL GRACE OFFERED TO AN ENEMY... BUT OFFERED WITHOUT EXCEPTION.. , THIS WELCOME... THIS YES.. COMES TO DESTABILIZE ALL ATTEMPTS TO LIMIT, TONE DOWN AND DOMESTICATE, THE SHATTERING EASTER WORD ... AN EVENT THAT IS AN ONGOING COUNTER-NARRATIVE CHALLENGING "THINGS AS THEY ARE."

AND THEN IN JOHN' S REVELATION IN EXILE ON PATMOS... WE HAVE A VISION OF THE HEAVENLY SONG THAT IS SUNG EVEN AND PERHAPS ESPECIALLYIN THE FACE OF AN EMPIRE'S PERSECUTIONS AND DEATH RATTLES....

IT IS A SONG THAT IS JOINED BY THE ALL CREATURES – GREAT AND SMALL.. JOINED BY THE EARTH, AND SUN AND MOON AND STARS..

A SONG THAT REJOICES.. IN THE TESTIMONY THAT AT THE CENTER OF GOD'S THRONE IS NOT AN AVENGING LION BUT A RECONCILING LAMB ..

AND THEN OF COURSE THERE IS THE BEACH... WHERE ANOTHER EASTER INTRUSION IS PLAYED OUT... PLAYED OUT IN THAT FAMILIAR LOCALE .. THE SEA OF GALILEE WITH ALL OF ITS MEMORIES OF FISHERFOLK , TEACHINGS, MIRACLES AND EXTRAVAGANT FEEDINGS..

IT BEGINS WITH THE ODD, MUNDANE WORDS OF PETER... I'M GOING FISHING... ..

AS IF TO SAY PERHAPS... I AM GOING BACK TO WHAT I KNOW BEST...
... AS PETER SIMPLY RE-ENGAGES WITH THE REGULAR, EXPECTED PATTERNS OF LIFE AND DEATH THAT HAVE SHAPED HIS PAST IDENTITY...

I AM GOING FISHING.. THE OTHERS JOIN HIM.. FISHING ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT..

THERE ON THE LAKE THOSE EXPECTING NOTHING NEW CAUGHT NOTHING.. UNTIL THE STRANGER ON THE BEACH YELLS OUT AND SUGGEST THEY TRY CASTING THEIR NETS IN A NEW DIRECTION...

AND SUDDENLY THE NETS ARE FULL, .. IN FACT.. OVERFLOWING.... AND THERE IN THAT ABUNDANCE THERE IS RECOGNITION – IT IS JESUS!! AND BECAUSE IT IS JESUSSOON THERE IS - OF COURSE - A MEAL.. A BREAKFAST ON THE BEACH... AROUND A CHARCOAL FIRE... A MEAL OF BREAD AND FISH ECHOING WITH THE OTHER MEALS THAT THEY HAVE SHARED WITH JESUS

BUT OF COURSE, THE LAST TIME ANYONE WAS AROUND A CHARCOAL FIRE.. IT WAS PETER IN THE COURT YARD OF THE HIGH PRIEST AFTER THE ARREST OF JESUS... WHERE PETER WAS INTERROGATED WITH 3 QUESTIONS... ANSWERED EACH TIME... I DO NOT KNOW THE MAN... I AM NOT A FOLLOWER... AFTER WHICH THAT INFAMOUS ROOSTER CROWED..

BUT HERE ON THE LAKESHORE.. COME THREE **NEW** QUESTIONS... AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN.....PETER ... DO YOU LOVE ME.. AS IF TO ASK.. PETER WHICH CHARCOAL FIRE DO YOU CHOOSE.. ?? WHICH PATTERN AND WAY DO YOU FOLLOW NOW?

HERE PETER IS ADDRESSED WITH A WORD THAT SEEKS TO DRAW HIM FURTHER OUT OF THE WORLD'S PATTERNS AND DEATH CYCLES INTO NEW LIFE..

HERE JESUS APPEARS ... WITH A WORD.. A WORD THAT SEEMS TO BE ANOTHER RESURRECTION EVEN – AN EASTER OFFER TO PETER AND THE OTHERS.. NOW YOU BE RAISED UP TO LIFE.. !! RECEIVE AGAIN YOUR IDENTITY AS A FOLLOWER LEANING INTO GOD'S FUTURE..

DO YOU LOVE ME PETER... ? FEED MY LAMBS; TEND MY SHEEP, FEED MY SHEEP.. BE EASTERED PETER.. BE THE RESURRECTION... BE THE BREAD... BE THE BODY OF CHRIST WITH YOUR SISTERS AND BROTHERS ... ON BEHALF OF THE CREATION

FOLLOW ME... JESUS SAYS.. FOLLOW ME INTO GOD'S FUTURE... FOLLOW ME TO THE PLACES WHERE WE CAN NOW HONESTLY FACE AND NAME ALL THAT STILL SHADOWS GOD'S BELOVED CREATION...

FOLLOW ME INTO ALL THE PLACES WHERE DEATH APPEARS TO HAVE WON, FOLLOW INTO THE PAIN AND SUFFERING IN OUR WORLD, FOLLOW ME INTO THESE PLACES SPEAKING NOW THE LIFE AND HOPE OF GOD'S FUTURE.

WITH THIS JESUS FORGIVENESS LEADS TO MISSION, RECONCILIATION LEADS TO A CALLING. TO EASTER LIFE..

HERE EASTER IS A VERB... SO THAT IN THIS FOLLOWING... EASTER BECOMES FEET MOVING, HANDS WORKING, WORDS WELCOMING

PETER IS NOW SENT OUT... TO GIVE TESTIMONY.. FOR THE DENIALS AND ABANDONMENT OF JESUS DO NOT LEAD TO GOD'S ABANDONMENT OF THE WORLD.. THE DEATH OF GOD' BELOVED DOES NOT BRING ABOUT OUR DEATH'S BUT RATHER LIFE FOR ALL ...

JESUS COMES TO THIS CHARCOAL FIRE BECAUSE HIS LIFE CONTINUES ON INTO A NEW FUTURE... JESUS IS RISEN SO THAT HE MAY CONTINUE TO ENCOUNTERED

ENCOUNTERED IN A VARIETY OF PLACES.. NOT JUST ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS.. OR ON THE SHORES OF GALILEE... OR AT THE PLACE OF EXILE IN PATMOS

BUT EVEN HERE IN THIS PLACE AS WELL .. AT THIS TABLE.. ... TODAY BREAD AND WINE.. LAYERED AND EMBODIED WITH GRACE... HAVE WEIGHT AND DEPTH HERE IS A WORD/ A PROMISE THAT DESPITE OUR DENIALS, OUR BETRAYALS, OR OUR FEEBLE FAITH .. THIS JESUS IS EMBODIED HERE.. PRESENT IN BREAD AND WINE.. FORGIVING AND SENDING

HERE WE ARE GIFTED WITH GOD'S YES.. ..

AND FROM HERE WE ARE SENT.. SENT TO TESTIFY.. TO BE EASTER TO DO EASTER.... TO LIVE EASTER.. AND TO GIVE EASTER AWAY... AS WE SING OUR ALLELUIAS

BUT YET..... HOW CAN THAT BE... HOW ARE WE ABLE TO SING ALLELUIA'S IN THE MIDST OF THIS WORLD AS WE KNOW IT

SUCH I THINK IS ONE OF THE GREAT QUESTIONS OF EASTER.. IN THIS WORLD...

HOW DO WE DARE SING ALLELUIAS IN THE FACE OF THE FEAR THAT SEEMS TO HAVE GRIPPED SO MUCH OF OUR PUBLIC LIFE...HOW DO WE DARE SING ALLELUIAS THE FACE OF THE TERRORS OF THE UKRAINE OR YEMEN AND SYRIA AND SO MANY OTHER PLACES OF HORROR .. HOW DARE WE SING OUR ALLELUIA'S AS THE CREATION ITSELF CONTINUES TO GROAN UNDER THE WEIGHT OF OUR CONSUMING WAYS...

AND YET... HOW DO WE DARE NOT SING THEM... IN THE FACE OF THE WORD... CHRIST IS RISEN.. THE CRUCIFIED ONE THE ONE WHO BECAME OUR TEARS AND OUR HEARTACHE AND OUR SIN... WHO BECAME GOD-FORSAKEN FOR US... THIS ONE GOD HAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD... FOR ALL ..FOR US AND ALL CREATURES.. FOR ALL OF CREATION..

LISTEN THEN TO THE TESTIMONIES OF ST. JOHN AND THE PEOPLE OF UKRAINE..

EXILED ON THE ISLAND PATMOS..WRITING TO THE 7 CHURCHES IN ASIA.. WHO ARE IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING AND GREAT PERSECUTION... JOHN.. DARES TO SING THE POETIC PRAISES... THAT DEFIANTLY OFFER A COUNTER POINT..

"WORTHY IS THE LAMB WHO WAS SLAUGHTERED... *WORTHY TO RECEIVE POWER AND WEALTH AND WISDOM AND MIGHT AND HONOR AND GLORY AND BLESSING...*"

IN THE MIDST OF GREAT FEAR AND TURMOIL... WITH POETIC DARING JOHN CONFESSES THE VISION OF GOD'S COMPASSION AND VICTORY THAT WILL EVEN OVERCOME THE PRESENT TRIBULATIONS...

AND THEN CLOSER IN TIME TO US... LAST SUNDAY... IN THE MIDST OF THE DEVASTATIONS IN UKRAINE ..IN BOMBED OUT STREETS UNDER THE THREAT OF MISSILES AND BOMBS... CROWDS STILL LINED UP WITH THEIR FOOD BASKETS FOR THE EASTER TRADITIONAL BLESSINGS... TESTIFYING TO A DEEP HOPE FOR EASTER LIFE EVEN IN THE MIDST OF THE SO MANY TRIBULATIONS THAT SURROUND THEM... THERE ALLELUIA'S WERE SUNG IN HOPE AND IN DEFIANCE OF ALL THAT WOULD SEEK TO SUBDUE THEM

WITH SUCH ALLELUIAS ROOTED IN EASTER HOPE WE TOO ARE CALLED TO OPEN OUR EARS TO THE LAMENTS AND KEENING IN THE WORLD... TO PRAY ...BESEECHING GOD THAT THE TEARS OF ALL MIGHT BE WIPED AWAY... THAT ALL WHO SUFFER AND ARE FORSAKEN MIGHT BE GIVEN HOPE AND LIFE... TRUSTING THE PROMISE OF GOD'S FUTURE WHERE EVEN DEATH ITSELF SHALL BE SWALLOWED UP FOREVER

AND SO IT IS THAT EASTER SONG AND PRAYER.. LIKE THE JEWISH PRAYER IN WHICH IT IS ROOTED.... INCLUDES PRAISE AND BESEECHING... ALLELUIAS AND INTERCESSIONS... THANKSGIVINGS AND LAMENTS

AND SO LET US DARE SING THE ALLELUIAS... EVEN WHEN OUR NETS ARE EMPTY...EVEN WHEN THE DARKNESS LINGERS IN OUR LIVES... EVEN WHEN WE STILL ARE HUNGRY FOR JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS.. EVEN WHEN WARS RAGE AND OPPRESIVE SYSTEMS BEAR DOWN ON SO MANY IN OUR LAND...LET US SING OUR ALLELUIAS AND FLING THEM OUT IN PROTEST AND HOPE

