

EASTER 5

MAY 15, 2022

ACTS 11:1-18

REVELATION 21:1-6

JOHN 13:31-35

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

ITS BEEN 28 DAYS.. 28 DAYS SINCE WE GATHERED TO HEAR THE YEARLY PROCLAMATION.. ... CHRIST IS RISEN.. 28 DAYS SINCE WE HEARD THE WORD THAT DEATH NO LONGER HAS THE LAST WORD.. 28 DAYS SINCE WE HEARD THE INSURRECTION RESURRECTION TESTIMONY THAT UNDERCUTS THE WAYS OF SIN AND DEATH IN THIS WORLD..

28 DAYS SINCE WE HEARD THIS ECCENTRIC PROMISE FULL OF HOPE AND GIFT... ECCENTRIC MEANING IT IS OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE.... OUTSIDE THE BOX ...OUTSIDE OUR CONTROL. OUTSIDE OUR EXPECTATIONS

BUT WE COME AGAIN 28 DAYS LATER BECAUSE WE KNOW WE ARE A PEOPLE OF SHORT ATTENTION SPANS.. WE JOKE ABOUT 15 MINUTES OF FAME BECAUSE WE KNOW.. THAT IN THIS CELBRITY, MULTI MEDIA DRIVEN CULTURE... WE ARE ALWAYS MOVING QUICKLY FROM ONE THING TO ANOTHER. EXPECIALLY AWAY FROM THOSE THINGS THAT ARE ECCENTRIC and OUTSIDE OF OUR CONTROL

AND IN THESE 28 DAYS SINCE THAT EASTER PROCLAMATION OUR FOCUS ON THE PROMISE HAS ERODED. IN THE MIDST THE WEAR AND TEAR OF DAILY DUTIES, DISTRACTIONS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS WE HAVE ALREADY TURNED OUR ATTENTION TO OTHER THINGS..

IN THESE DAYS THEN.... HOW IS IT THAT ARE WE HOLD ONTO THE EASTER WORD IN THE MIDST OF THE VIOLENCE AND DISTURBANCES AND FEARS THAT CROWD IN TO COMMAND OUR ATTENTION.. WE HAVE BEEN BUFFETED BY EVENTS IN THE UKRAINE WHILE THE PANDEMIC CONTINUES... THE DAILY LITANY OF DIVISIVE AND UGLY POLITICAL RHETORIC GOES ON AND ON.. WHILE THE NEEDS OF THE POOR AND VULNERABLE CONTINUE TO BE IGNORED .. AND THEN OF COURSE .. THERE ARE THE PERSONAL, RELATIONAL HEARTACHES SO EVER PRESENT... DIAGNOSES, SEPARATIONS... HEARTACHES AND GRIEFS... ALL THIS AND MORE CONSPIRE TO DISTRACT US FROM THE SAVING WORD OF EASTER

AND SO WE GATHER AGAN... SEEKING A WORD OF EASTER HOPE IN THE MIDST OF SO MUCH THAT SHADOWS OUR DAILY LIVES..

... ITS BEEN 28 DAYS AND STILL WE LONG FOR COMFORT AND THE COURAGE TO LIVE AN EASTER LIFE..

SO WE COME TO HEAR AGAIN THE WORD THAT IS MADE FLESH IN THE LIFE, DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS AND IN THE VISIONS OF PETER AND JOHN..

BEFORE US ARE 3 TEXTS THAT ARE GENERATIVE AND LIFE GIVING TESTIMONIES TO THE EASTER POWER OF GOD ...TEXTS THAT PROMISE TO FUND AND SHAPE OUR ENGAGEMENT WITH THE DEATH NARRATIVES SO EVER PRESENT IN THIS WORLD.. .

THESE TEXTS ARE ECCENTRIC TESTIMONIES THAT CHALLENGE THE TOXIC STORIES BY WHICH WE LIVE SO OFTEN IN THIS WORLD

IN THE GOSPEL WE HAVE HEARD THE WELL KNOWN COMMAND OF JESUS AT THAT LAST SUPPER BEFORE HIS CRUCIFIXION .. A WORD THAT HAS CONTINUED TO BE A POWERFUL TESTIMONY THROUGHOUT THE AGES..

ON THE ONE HAND... IT A SIMPLE, STRAIGHT FORWARD COMMAND.. LITTLE CHILDREN ..LOVE ONE ANOTHER..

BUT AS IT IS SANDWICHED BETWEEN JESUS PREDICTIONS OF THE BETRAYAL BY JUDAS AND THE DENIAL TO COME OF PETER.. THIS COMMAND TAKES ON LAYERS OF MEANING THAT SUGGEST JESUS SPEAKS OF A LOVE THAT WILL BE SUSTAINED *EVEN* IN THE MIDST OF SHADOWS AND THREAT.

IN 2 SHORT VERSES IT IS REPEATED 3 TIMES LOVE ONE ANOTHER .. AND SO THE EARLY CHURCH TOOK THIS WORD TO HEART.. AS THEY SOUGHT TO LIVE EASTER IN THE MIDST OF PERSECUTIONS, PLAGUES, AND THE MANY OTHER SHADOWS OF THIS LIFE. ...

IN SO DOING .. CHRISTIANS BECAME KNOWN FOR THE LOVE THEY SHARED. A LOVE THAT WAS EMBODIED IN CARE FOR THE SICK AND DYING.. AND EVEN IN THE MANNER IN WHICH THEY CARED FOR THE BELOVED DEAD..

IT IS A WORD THAT HAS FUNDED STREAMS OF CHRISTIAN PACIFISM AND CARE AND ADVOCACY FOR THE POOR AND OUTCASTS.. AND YES, IT GAVE RISE TO THE WORD.. THAT THEY WILL KNOW THAT WE ARE CHRISTIANS BY OUR LOVE..

SO THEN.. IN OUR 2ND LESSON.. IT IS ALSO THE CASE THAT IN THE MIDST OF ROMAN PERSECUTIONS AND EXILE.. IN THE MIDST OF SO MANY THINGS THAT RAGE IN THE VALLEYS AND SHADOWS OF DEATH... IN HIS REVELATION VISION....JOHN ALSO TESTIFIED TO GOD'S EASTER PROMISE..

JOHN SANG OUT A VISION OF GOD'S PROMISE TO MAKE ALL THINGS NEW.. WITH AN ECCENTRIC WORD THAT HEAVEN ITSELF SHALL COME DOWN TO EARTH.. WHERE EVEN TEARS SHALL BE WIPED AWAY FROM ALL FACES.. AS GOD COMES TO DWELL WITH US.

JOHN HELD UP THIS VISION AGAINST THE NIGHTMARE NARRATIVE OF THIS WORLD.. TESTIFYING AGAIN AND AGAIN... THAT DEATH DOES NOT HAVE THE LAST WORD... AND THAT GOD COMING TO BE WITH US AND THE WHOLE CREATION IS NOT TO BE FEARED BUT RATHER IS TO BE LEANED INTO AND RECEIVED IN JOY

WHICH BRINGS US TO PETER'S VISION.. THE 3RD EASTER WORD FOR THIS DAY... IT IS A VISION SO STAGGERING IN ITS EFFECT THAT AFTER ITS TELLING... THE CHURCH WAS NEVER THE SAME AGAIN ...

BLESSED ST. PETER KEEPS ON SURPRISING US ... AT TIMES HE SEEMS SO DOWN TO EARTH AND CAUTIOUS... SO HUMAN.. LIKE WHEN HE TRIED TO STOP JESUS FROM SPEAKING OF HIS PASSION AND DEATH... OR WHEN HE DENIED JESUS IN THE COURTYARD WITH THE ROOSTER CROWING IN THE BACKGROUND..

BUT OF COURSE HE ALSO WAS WILLING TO IMMEDIATELY DROP HIS NETS AND FOLLOW.. HE SEEMED TO ALWAYS BE WILLING TO JUMP IN THE WATER TO MEET THIS JESUS...

BUT TODAY.. PETER JUMPS INTO A WHOLE NEW JOURNEY... IT IS SUCH A SHOCKING SHIFT THAT ST. LUKE RETELLS IT TWICE IN CHAPTERS 10 & 11.

HERE BEFORE US IS THIS EASTERING VISION.. THIS DREAM THAT OPENS UP A NEW WHOLE CAN OF WORMS... AN ECCENTRIC VISION THAT DISTURBS A WHOLE WORLD VIEW AN OVERTURNING THAT IS PATTERNED IN THE CONFESSION THAT JESUS HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD

PETER HAD BEEN RAISED BY HIS FAMILY AND CONGREGATION TO BELIEVE THAT THERE WERE LIMITS AND BOUNDARIES THAT WERE VITAL TO THE PRESERVATION OF LIFE AND IDENTITY IN THIS DANGEROUS WORLD

.. HE WAS TAUGHT THAT CERTAIN FOODS AND CERTAIN PEOPLE WERE UNCLEAN .. AND THAT IN ORDER TO PRESERVE HIS OWN IDENTITY AND LIFE HE MUST STAY IN THE MIDST HIS OWN PEOPLE...

BUT NOW HE HAS A VISION...

IN HIS DREAM THERE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN A LARGE SHEET HOLDING A BUNCH OF CREATURES.. INCLUDING BIRDS OF PREY AND REPTILES.. AND A VOICE IN THE DREAM HAD SAID TO HIM... RISE AND EAT...

BUT OF COURSE .. PETER KNEW HE SHOULD NOT, COULD NOT, WOULD NOT DO IT.. TO EAT THEM WOULD HAVE VIOLATED HIS WHOLE WAY OF SORTING OUT RIGHT AND WRONG IN A COMPLEX WORLD. IT WOULD HAVE CALLED INTO QUESTION THE WHOLE WAY OF BEING IN THE WORLD HE HAD LEARNED

AND SO PETER RESPONDED TO THE VOICE FROM HEAVEN .. WITH A NO.. I CANNOT EAT THESE FOODS.. THEY ARE UNCLEAN!! MY MOTHER , MY FATHER.. MY CONGREGATION HAVE TAUGHT ME SO..

AND THE VOICE RESPONDED.. WHAT GOD HAS MADE CLEAN YOU MUST NOT CALL UNCLEAN... AND BACK IF FORTH IT WENT.. NO SAID PETER.. YES SAID THE VOICE...

BACK AND FORTH IT WENT UNTIL IT BECAME CLEAR SUCH boundary crossing WAS AN IDEA SO BOLD, SO DISRUPTIVE, SO UNSETTLING, SO ECCENTRIC THAT IT HAD COME FROM THE GOD WHO BROUGHT CREATION OUT OF THE VOID AND BROUGHT FORTH LIFE OUT DEATH IN THE RESURRECTION

AND SO ... ONCE AGAIN PETER JUMPS INTO THE DEEP WATERS TO FOLLOW JESUS... HE GOES OFF TO MEET WITH THE UNCIRCUMCISED, OPPRESSING ROMAN SOLDIER CORNELIUS – HE WENT to Caesarea.. TO ENEMY OF HIS PEOPLE...TO the VERY HEADQUARTERS of the OCCUPYING roman garrison ..AND THERE .. PETER ATE WITH THIS ROMAN.. HE TAUGHT HIM AND BAPTIZED HIM.. AND HIS WHOLE HOUSEHOLD

ONCE AGAIN.. GOD HAS BROKEN OPEN PETER'S WORLD WITH A NEW THING.. HE LEARNS THAT IN ORDER TO FOLLOW THE RESURRECTED ONE ... HE MUST LEAVE BEHIND EVERYTHING THAT IS NO LONGER BIG ENOUGH OR BOLD ENOUGH FOR GOD' S EXPANSIVE EASTERING LOVE

THIS VISION IS A RELENTLESS ASSAULT ON OUR TRIBAL PASSION FOR DISTINCTIONS, DIVISION AND SEPARATION A WORD THAT CONFRONTS ALL OF OUR ATTEMPTS TO HINDER GOD AND TO HINDER GOD'S OFFER OF LIFE FOR ALL...

THIS EASTER VISION GIVEN TO PETER HAS PROFOUNDLY SHAPED THE CHURCH'S TESTIMONY THAT JUST AS ALL ARE CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE... GOD'S EXPANSIVE MERCY IS FOR ALL..

I SAY THIS KNOWING THAT SO MUCH OF THE CHURCH'S TEACHINGS AND ACTIONS OVER TIME HAVE BEEN THE OPPOSITE... TOO OFTEN RE-ENFORCING SEPARATION AND DIVISION.. BUT THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT THIS EASTER VISION HAS NOT BEEN TAMED..

FOR EVEN AS WE SEARCH ENDLESSLY FOR WAYS TO RESIST ... WHENEVER IT IS READ AND HEARD IN THE GATHERING OF THE COMMUNITY .. THE VISION WORKS IT'S DESTABILIZING WAYS..

SEEKING TO SHAPE OUR IMAGINATIONS.. SO THAT WE WOULD TRUST AND LIVE AS IF ALL ARE INVITED—NO DISTINCTION, NO PRIVILEGE, NO ADVANCED NOTICE AND NO ADVANTAGE IN BETTER FAITH OR BETTER FUTURE. ALL ARE "CLEAN".. ALL ARE WELCOME..

YES .. WE ARE ALWAYS SEEKING A DEFENSE FROM SUCH AN EXPANSIVE NOTION OF GOD'S GRACE...

UNABLE TO IMAGINE GOD'S REGARD FOR US AS GIFT AND FREE... WE ARE ALWAYS SEEKING SOME HOOK.. SOME CLAIM ON GOD FROM WITHIN OURSELVES... SOME WAY TO CLAIM JUSTICE IS ON OUR SIDE.. UNABLE TO TRUST THIS ECCENTRIC LOVE THAT COMES FROM OUTSIDE OF US... UNABLE TO TRUST GOD'S REGARD FOR THE OTHER IN OUR MIDST... AND FINALLY UNABLE TO TRUST GOD'S REGARD FOR OURSELVES... OR EVEN THAT GOD WOULD TRULY COME DOWN TO DWELL AND BE WITH US ALL..

BUT GOD PROMISES TO COME.. TO BREAK OPEN THE STALE ARRANGEMENTS BY WHICH WE SO OFTEN LIVE AND DIE.. AND SO WE ARE HERE AGAIN.. 28 DAYS INTO THIS EASTER

FOR THE RADICAL WORD THAT CHRIST IS RISEN IS NOT A FLOATING SPIRITUAL METAPHOR FOR A DIS-EMBODIED LOVE,... BUT RATHER IT IS A WORD THAT WOULD TURN US TO THE BODIES AND NEEDS OF OUR NEIGHBORS AROUND US.. THIS EASTER WORD IS NOT A PRIVATE SPIRITUAL EVENT BUT A REAL, CONCRETE, PUSH INTO THE RELATIONSHIPS OF HUMAN COMMUNITY AND THE WHOLE CREATION ITSELF...

A RISEN CHRIST WHOSE BODY STILL BEARS THE MARKS OF THE WOUNDS WILL SEND US PASSIONATELY INTO THE VERY STUFF OF THIS WORLD... WHETHER IT BE WITH ADVOCACY AND THE SEEKING JUSTICE; WHETHER IT BE QUILT MAKING OR INSTALLING SOLAR PANELS; OR WHETHER IT BE THE CONTANT SEEKING OF RECONCILIATION AND MERCY FOR ALL .

WE COME 28 DAYS LATER ...

BECAUSE WE NEED TO PRACTICE THIS VISION AGAIN AND AGAIN.. FOR THIS INSURRECTION, RESURRECTION LIFE IS A THREAT TO THE TOXIC STORY OF OUR WORLD.. ... A WORLD THAT SEEKS TO DIVIDE US FROM ONE ANOTHER... A WORLD THAT SEEKS TO CLAIM CREATION AS ITS OWN.. TO USE AND ABUSE..

AND SO.. WE GATHER TO PRACTICE THIS VISION ...

WE SHARE THE PEACE.. AND PRACTICE THIS LOVING ONE ANOTHER.. FOR IT IS SO VERY LIKELY... THAT WHEN WE TURN TO EACH OTHER THIS DAY.. HIDDEN IN OUR NEIGHBORS LIFE AND HEART WILL BE FEARS, AND HEARTCHES, LOSSES, ANXIETIES ,, .. SO LET US.. SPEAK THIS WORD TO EACH OTHER THAT STANDS AGAINST THE SHADOWS *GOD'S PEACE BE WITH YOU*

WE LIFT UP PRAYERS OF PRAISE AND PLEADING TRUSTING IN THE VISION THAT GOD COMES TO DWELL WITH US

AND AT THIS MEAL... WE PRACTICE THE EASTER WORD.. THAT ALL ARE WELCOME WITHOUT EXCEPTION... REGARDLESS OF STATUS OR HUMAN ACCOMPLISHMENT.. REGARDLESS OF DEGREES OF FAITH OR BELIEF..

HERE AT THIS MEAL .. ALL RECEIVE THE SAME.. ALL ARE WELCOME AND ALL RECEIVE CHRIST... HERE ALL RECEIVE .. AS CHRIST COMES TO BE WITH US.. WITH FORGIVENESS AND HOPE...

AND ALL OF US ARE THEN SENT OUT.. TO LOVE ANOTHER.. TO LOVE ALL OTHERS... NEIGHBORS, STRANGERS AND ENEMIES.. TO GIVE OURSELVES AWAY IN THE SAME MANNER CHRIST GIVES HIMSELF TO US..

SO 28 DAYS LATER... COME AND EAT.. AND GO AND GIVE YOURSELF AWAY..