

2nd Sunday of Easter

Cycle A, 4.19.20

Acts 2:42-47/1 Peter 1:3-9/ John 20:19-31

A NEW BIRTH TO A LIVING HOPE... EVEN IN THE MIDST OF TRIAL

Looking at my calendar this week, I noted that today, April 19th, would have been my father's birthday. He was born in 1907 and would be 113 years old were he alive today. He died when I was only 27 years old. 1907 -- That means that he was an 11-year old little boy when the Spanish flu or "1918 Flu Pandemic" infected one quarter to one third of the world's population. Estimates vary that between 50-100 million people died, including 675,000 in our country. Young adults between the ages of 20-40 accounted for half of the deaths.



It struck just as World War I was ending and thousands of soldiers were still in trenches and encampments. An entry from the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, final edition of 1918, tells a sobering story:

"The year 1918 has gone: a year momentous as the termination of the most cruel war in the annals of the human race; a year which marked the end, at least for a time, of man's destruction of man; unfortunately a year in which developed a most fatal infectious disease causing the death of hundreds of thousands of human beings. Medical science for four and

one-half years devoted itself to putting men on the firing line and keeping them there. Now it must turn with its whole might to combating the greatest enemy of all -- infectious disease,"

There were no ICUs at that time. They had no antivirals, no vaccines for flu, no idea back then that the flu was even a virus. It was a wounded world – far more wounded than our world today, though plagued as we are by an insidious piece of creation. Interesting that the word 'plague' has its root in a Latin word for "wound."

Growing up I never recall my Dad speaking about that world-wide crisis. One would think that such a catastrophic event would make a permanent impression, even upon a child. Did he not speak of it because the memories were too painful? or because his family in Indiana weren't touched by the pandemic? I guess I'll never know. Despite the high morbidity and mortality rates that resulted from the epidemic, the Spanish flu began to fade from public awareness over the decades. Now, that century-old tragedy is a thing of the past, an historical article in Wikipedia, and a medical crisis being called up again for analysis as doctors and scientists try to understand the virus that currently violates our century.

It makes sense that we try to put bad stuff behind us – to forget the dark thing, whether it be a bad accident or an embarrassing situation, the tension with a family member or a failed relationship, a job that never met with success or a dark period of our life. The experience of the apostles following Christ's crucifixion parallels our own situation:

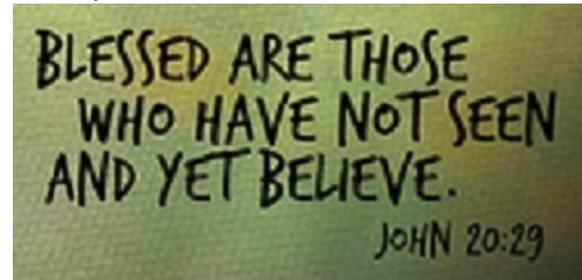


On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked where the disciples were out of fear... Locked in fear, locked in social isolation, trying not to recall the failed enterprise of Jesus, Master and Teacher, whom they hoped would be their salvation, their Messiah. Days before, they fled as powers they thought to be greater than theirs, greater even than God's, seemed to overcome their hopes and destroy their dreams. Jesus – put on trial, humiliated and scourged, was crucified and died on a cross. Now he comes to them – in all his glory, through locked doors, with a greeting of “Peace” for their hearts and souls, for their minds and even for their bodies. Yet, he comes to them in his woundedness, even to Thomas who missed the first encounter, who was late on the scene. It was Thomas’ persistence that helped the other disciples and can help us to purify our faith and to know fully the One in whom we believe, in whom we place our trust.



Then Jesus said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do

*not be unbelieving, but believe.” Only then do they and we know: this IS the God proclaimed in the gospels and in the Epistles of Paul, the God of Easter, the only one worthy of being followed even into the darkest reaches of sin and death, of pandemic and anxiety, of fear and uncertainty. Jesus is the One who makes all things new by loving us with an eternal love from which nothing at all can separate us. No longer locked in fear because of the dark things that happened, they can have joy in their hearts and can proclaim to one another and to all who will listen: *My Lord and my God.**



The Letter of Peter encourages us to hold on to that faith in these trying times and to be confident of our victory in Christ when he writes:

In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

We can learn from the **past**, not forgetting the dark things but extending forgiveness and mercy and remembering that all things are passing. Hopefully, wisdom, science and courage will help us to face the **present**. The **future**, because of our faith in the Risen Lord, we entrust into God's Providence, singing as we often have:

*And he will raise you up on eagle's wings,
bear you on the breath of dawn,
make you to shine like the sun,
and hold you in the palm of his hand.*



Let the Risen Lord's greeting of "Peace"
reign in your heart and in your home.

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