



Easter Hymn

*If in that Syrian garden, ages slain,
You sleep, and know not you are dead in vain,
Nor even in dreams behold how dark and bright
Ascends in smoke and fire by day and night
The hate you died to quench and could but fan,
Sleep well and see no morning, son of man.*

*But if, the grave rent and the stone rolled by,
At the right hand of majesty on high
You sit, and sitting so remember yet
Your tears, your agony and bloody sweat,
Your cross and passion and the life you gave,
Bow hither out of heaven and see and save*
A.E. Housman (1859-1936)

Although Housman was not a believer in any traditional sense, his poem (unpublished during his lifetime) remains one of the most popular poems of these great Fifty Days of Eastertide. The final line, admonishing the risen and ascended Lord that he has work to do still on earth, has special resonance for us this year. It is hard to think of a part of our lives unaffected by the worldwide pandemic, where confusion even over the vaccines has complicated many lives (and has become a political issue), the virus itself refuse to abate in a world where people of color continue to suffer needlessly; it would be easy to say that Christ's work is not yet done.

But the question remains about whether it is Christ's work alone that we are discussing. Throughout Eastertide, we are able to see Jesus and his disciples from different angles: the one who stands among them and says, "Peace be with you," in locked rooms and tells them, "You are witnesses of these things" after he has opened their minds to the scriptures. He calls himself, "the gate for the sheep, one who encourages them to "bear much fruit and be my disciples." Finally, he reminds us of the one thing necessary, to love one another as he has loved us, the love commandment from Maundy Thursday. It is more than just encouragement or moral support; it is an invitation to see what love looks like and to act on our riven, suffering world as only love can.

Moreover, we do not have the option of hedging our bets, as Housman does. Our identity as post-resurrection, stand-up people does not begin with, "If..." I was exploring with the confirmation class the idea that everything we repeat in our creeds is not a conditional proposition; it is rather something we literally set our hearts by. The same is true in the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. He offers us what we need to sustain our belief, including touching

St. Paul's Church

422 Market St.
Box 1551, Camden,
New Jersey 08101

his wounds, giving him some broiled fish (or whatever we have), seeing him as the gate for the place where we all can be safe and to love one another in the ways we have been loved. We are then sent out into the world to bind-up the wounds of others, to feed the hungry and, above all, to love as deeply and indiscriminately as we dare, knowing all the while that it is the risen Christ working in us and through us who is bowing "out of heaven to see and save." We have nowhere else to go in a post-resurrection world.

We do not have the option to say that the work is too dangerous or difficult, that our piety ought to be enough. This is our work, our love to offer and no one else can give it but us. That is what it means to be people of the Resurrection. Our work during these Great Fifty Days is to be about seeking out this Christ in the most unlikely, even appalling circumstances and to greet him with the same joy as Mary Magdalene and the disciples. We have shared the joy and witnessed the struggle; it is now our responsibility to spread the good news with our minds, our lips and, most of all, our hearts.

UTO and Gratitude

The United Thank Offering (UTO) is a ministry of The Episcopal Church for the mission of the whole church. Through UTO, individuals are invited to embrace and deepen a personal daily spiritual discipline of gratitude. UTO encourages people to notice the good things that happen each day, give thanks to God for those blessings and make an offering for each blessing using a UTO Blue Box.

Thinking about the mission of UTO, centered in thanksgiving for the blessings of God and considering what to offer of ourselves in response, represented a special challenge this year. Until recently, I had only experienced the UTO through the iconic “blue boxes” that had been a feature of Lent ever since I was a child, placing a quarter in the box for every blessing I could name or simply for the presence of God in our daily lives. In a year when unprecedented occurrences, worries about the parish and the state of our families threatened to overwhelm the blessings we could count, it became a special discipline to be mindful of the God-given blessings in my life and those around me. It was in that spirit that I decided to apply for a grant from the UTO to help fund our new health clinic. The result, I learned late last week, was a gift of over \$11,000 toward supplies and operational costs for the clinic, blessings benefitting the parish as well as the poor and uninsured in our neighborhood. It was one of 27

successful grant applications worldwide in this cycle and the only one in our diocese.

The challenge for the grant cycle was a special one this year, as it was designated toward projects that were specifically addressing the challenges of the pandemic. The charge was to think of how we could cultivate a mindset of gratitude in a time when about three million people worldwide have perished for the virus, millions more have become ill, countless jobs lost in this country and across the world and the economic underpinnings of the worldwide economy have been thrown into uncertainty. My own gratitude began in the knowledge that no one in the parish had died (my colleagues in nearby parishes, sadly, could not say the same), that through love for one another and sheer grit, we were able to retain a sense of community in worship and in our ministries, even providing for those who were most affected by the pandemic through our new food ministries and a new clinic to

provide basic health care for those who would otherwise not be able to obtain it.

Another source of gratitude was the Rutgers nursing students, with their intrepid attitude and good humor in staffing a completely new project. We are all on a learning curve in understanding how best to use this new resource at St. Paul’s, with the hope that its use could extend in the coming years to graduate students and, ultimately, to those at the medical school. In applying for the grant, my questions were the same as those I asked when we began the clinic: could we justify another ministry, begun in a time of uncertainty, when there were so many unknowns. In our part of the kingdom, I believe the answer has been a resounding yes. I am grateful to the bishop for his support, the UTO people for their enthusiastic backing of this project and to a God who can love us past our uncertainties and equip us to extend that love into the most neglected corners of our lives.

ECS and the Diocese of NJ

"Whatever I had read as a child about the saints had thrilled me. I could see the nobility of giving one's life for the sick, the maimed, the leper. Priests and Sisters the world over could be working for the littlest ones of Christ, and my heart stirred at their work. But there was another question in my mind. Why was so much done in remedying the evil instead of avoiding it in the first place?... Where were the saints to try to change the social order, not just to minister to the slaves, but to do away with slavery?"

Dorothy Day

Most will know that I am, in many ways, a disciple of the teachings of Dorothy Day. It has been a welcome surprise that Bishop Stokes has chosen one of Day's provocative questions as the starting point for Episcopal Community Services in New Jersey. While many parishes, including our own, have been doing valuable mission work among the poor for many years, there has been very little coordination among parishes on issues of hunger, homelessness, lack of access to medical care and all the attendant precariousness the poor among us endure each day. I was a member of ECS in the Diocese of Pennsylvania when I was canonically resident there; as that diocese is far more compact, encompassing Philadelphia and the surrounding counties, the function of ECS is very specific, looking primarily at urban poverty and strategies for long-term success in fighting it. By contrast, the Diocese of NJ contains both urban

and rural areas; the approach to combatting poverty will look very different in different regions. It is within these disparate environments that ECS, in its very nascent stages, is working to share best practices, cultivate networking among parishes confronting similar issues, raise funds to enable grants to be issued to parishes confronting the thorny issues of poverty and inequity, and to do so asking if we are willing to "strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being," as we affirm in our own baptismal covenant.

It is not an accident that this effort is beginning during the pandemic. For many of us, the fissures of inequity regarding access to basic human services have widened into chasms, forcing us to confront intolerable situations that should have been addressed long ago. One of the advantages of the way we govern ourselves is that community is

always a priority. We need to know what our neighbors in Trenton and Asbury Park are doing, not only because they need our prayers but that they have gleaned hard-won knowledge in fighting both the effects and sources of poverty that could be of use to us.

You will likely hear more about ECS, not only because I am working with fourteen other lay and clergy people throughout the diocese in trying to put it into motion but because we have to be able to communicate our stories, share our victories and encourage each other in our efforts toward a more just and equitable society. As we answer our baptismal questions with, 'I will, with God's help,' I hope we can be generous in our support, our listening and our sharing of ideas and, with God's help, to show our determination to ending slavery to poverty in all its forms.

Stewardship!

Knowing that keeping our pledges current in a time when many of us continue to feel the dangers of the pandemic, I would like to encourage everyone to keep her or his pledge current. If you cannot attend services, please send your pledge directly to St. Paul's or have your bank set up a direct payment plan. If you have questions about the latter option, please contact the wardens or Fr. Mark. Thank you!

Baptisms!

It is hard to believe, but Pentecost is only a month away. If you know of someone who would like to have a member of their family baptized on that day (May 23), please contact Fr. Mark. Many thanks!