

All Saints Episcopal Church South Burlington, Vermont

Homily Easter Sunday 2020

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It is shocking how quickly one's world can change and life become so different. One's very safety at risk and the future unknown. New steps must be taken to cope with it all. Strong feelings of uncertainty, fear and sadness are in the air. Old familiar ways need to be left behind and new ways forward found. It takes courage when things seem so unpredictable. One must find hope and persistence to carry on. One must trust that God will not abandon, but will see one through to a new era beyond.

I suppose as a preacher at this time of pandemic, I might have begun this sermon by addressing our coronavirus challenges . Perhaps you thought that was exactly what I was doing when I began this sermon.

But, hear again what was said: lives changed; so much being suddenly different; an unknown future; one's safety at risk; feelings of uncertainty and fear; needing to find new ways forward and needing to reach deep within and with one another to find trust in God.

You see, when I began this sermon I was not describing our present COVID crisis, but the similar and shocking challenges Jesus' disciples faced as their world spun out of control into a time of uncertainty and fear when Jesus died on the cross.

We tend to forget what these vulnerable men and women must have felt when they hid behind locked doors in the very room where, just hours before, they had eaten the Last Supper with Jesus. The disciples now "sheltered in place" in the Upper Room, "for fear of the Jews". The passing of time and the balm of history can too easily numb us to what must have been the raw experiences of those disciples.

The disciples' fears and feelings must have been much like our own present day fears and feelings as we face this pandemic: uncertainty; sadness, an unknown future; feeling unsafe; needing to find new ways forward and needing to reach deep within ourselves and to one another to find trust in God.

Those disciples of old faced the raw reality of a cruel death, the death of their Teacher on the cross, and Darkness descended. And so it is in our present day, with

unbelievable swiftness the plague and its darkness has descended upon our world as illness and cruel death take their toll. But the darkness of the cross was not the end of the story for the disciples back then and by the Grace of God neither will this COVID darkness have the final word in our time.

The darkness of Jesus' death that initially had descended upon the disciples was suddenly and powerfully pierced through by the rising Light of Jesus' resurrection. The Mystery of salvation unfolded after three days, in its own timetable, and the initial hopelessness of the disciples was transformed into belief, fear transformed into courage, and uncertainty transformed into faith as they encountered the Risen Christ.

The disciples went to Galilee as they had been told, and the Risen Christ said to them: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Does the experience of the disciples and their transformation from hopelessness to hope have anything to say to us today? Can we believe Christ's promise "I am with you always, to the end of the age"?

We are surrounded by the Pandemic Darkness of a microscopic enemy rampaging in our midst. Feelings of fear, sadness, frustration, impatience, and impotence abound. We are in the midst of a crisis with no predictable end in site.

When all of our former illusions about being in control now seem pathetic at best, when death stalks the corridors of hospitals and nursing homes, when masks and gloves seem fragile defenses against an insidious enemy, when family, friends and neighbors test positive, to whom can we turn?

Perhaps the apostle Paul said it best in the Epistle To The Romans:

"What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us".

"Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword **or covid-19?** No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor

powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”.

Not anything else in all creation: not coronavirus, nor anything else will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”.

The Risen Christ has promised to be with us to the end of the Ages, and that promise is good especially for the worst of times, like now. Jesus said so, and I believe him.