

#20 15-16

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

I Corinthians 15:19-26

John 20:1-18

Acts 10:34-43

## *We Are Witnesses To All His Good*

Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ – he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

This past week has surely been a week in which we all experienced something of what Passion week is all about. We witnessed the pain of innocents being brutally handled and murdered in Brussels, and we have been reminded that terror seems to be lurking around the corner, waiting for that moment when we begin to feel safe and comfortable. We witnessed the pain of the loss of a loved one in Kathy Benson’s funeral, and the funeral of my friend Sharon, and so many more. And this day, when we contemplate Easter, would not be complete without putting it in context of the events in this last week, both in the liturgical cycle as well as in our contemporary news cycle.

Muslim author, Omid Safi wrote:

Easter for me is irrevocably tied to Good Friday: The redemption is so sweet because the suffering is also real. As my Christian friends believe that Christ suffered on the cross for our sins, I too come to see that some measure of suffering on any spiritual path is necessary. I am suspicious of spiritual paths that promise “cheap” joy here and now. I am suspicious of spiritual teachers that promise us the “gospel of prosperity” or “happiness”, for I wonder how much compassion they have towards those who are poor, or genuinely suffering. Are the un-prosperous (the majority of us humans) and those who suffer the children of a lesser God?

In light of pain and sorrow and suffering, how can we proclaim on this day that we are all witnesses to Jesus’ good? Is this good that we rejoice about only for after we die? Or is this day about the process of looking ahead, through the suffering for the spiritual goal of KNOWING that God is with us, and if we continue to press on, we will feel the ecstasy of the resurrection!?! Pastor Bruce Barkhauer wrote: “Jesus did not die to get you into heaven, but to get heaven into you, and through you into the world.”

Working through Lent towards Easter means taking seriously the injustice of the world and believing that on this day, having seriously contemplated the pain of Good Friday and Saturday, that if we can practice this rhythm in our spiritual cycle, we will know, that in the real world, when the inevitable suffering comes, we will be in practice for the Easter joy!

This day represents the *promise* that after the pain and the loss, there is hope and there is progress . . . there is growth and truth and light and beauty and joy! We can look at the wrongs and continue to live as people who have been tainted and scarred . . . or we can wear our scars as symbols of what we have

overcome! Because Jesus lived, and endured and overcame because he wanted us to KNOW that we are blessed and regardless of what we have had happened to us - we are called to be loved and joyous!

Now, we may not all be there today, and just because it says in the calendar that today is Easter, and we are called to be happy, this doesn't mean we are all going to be there, and that we are less of a Christian if we aren't all there yet! But rest assured, we are people of the RISEN Christ! We are people in the promise of a process towards compassion and joy.

Being people of a risen Christ, we have the goal of Easter every day of the year! We practice it purposefully the 6 weeks before the Jewish celebration of Passover, but we have that possibility every day of the year in which we call ourselves Christians.

Peter is quoted as saying, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power . . . he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him . . . we are witnesses to all that he did." Let us reflect on all the good that Jesus did. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about good that Jesus did? Or ~ what did he teach us about who we are called to be and what we are called to do in his name?

We truly are witnesses to all his good. He truly does have a miraculous way of transforming lives.

I would like to share a little observation about the caterpillar, cocoon, butterfly process with you that I did not mention before with the kids. Did you know what really happens inside the cocoon? According to "Scientific American":

First, the caterpillar digests itself, releasing enzymes to dissolve all of its tissues. If you were to cut open a cocoon or chrysalis at just the right time, caterpillar soup would ooze out. But the contents of the pupa are not entirely an amorphous mess. Certain highly organized groups of cells known as imaginal discs survive the digestive process. Before hatching, when a caterpillar is still developing inside its egg, it grows an imaginal disc for each of the adult body parts it will need as a mature butterfly or moth—discs for its eyes, for its wings, its legs and so on . . . Some caterpillars walk around with tiny rudimentary wings tucked inside their bodies, though you would never know it by looking at them. Once a caterpillar has disintegrated all of its tissues except for the imaginal discs, those discs use the protein-rich soup all around them to fuel the rapid cell division required to [form all the other features of an adult butterfly or moth].

So, before a caterpillar can become a butterfly, it has to allow itself to suffer a tremendous amount of loss. Loss physically and loss of itself. It will never be able to walk around on all those legs and eat leaves like it used to. But the hints of who it would one day become were always within it. And before it could develop those wings to fly and the proboscis could sip the sweet nectar from the flowers, this crawling leaf eating creature had to dissolve. This is what we are promised, through Christ, when we suffer on this earth, that even as human beings we can become good and loving and compassionate human beings anew. And through that compassion and unconditional love and non judgment of all others, we will experience the wings of joy and the nectar of sweet love! Both human and godly! This is what Jesus came to this earth to share with us, this is what Easter is all about! God is love! Jesus is our Savior from hopelessness! Life is about Joy! We are witnesses to all the possibility for goodness that this earth knows! May this year bring us all the sweet, sweet nectar of hope and the wings of Bliss! AMEN