

Message from Rev. Bill Perry for Consecon Pastoral Charge on Easter Sunday April 4, 2021

Lectionary Readings Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; John 20:1-18

Today I am going to write about the Easter story beginning at what might seem like a strange point. But maybe that's good. We are living the Easter story 2021 from a strange place, amid a pandemic which threatens us and alters our living in large ways. You are reading these thoughts because gathering in person feels unsafe. Thus, let us begin our story in the early accounts of God's creating, God's relationship with Creation. God creates and populates the Garden of Eden.

Journalists and television cameras are not allowed in the Garden Eden, thus we have only one description of that location, that found in our Bible. Reading that description tells us the Garden of Eden was a good, happy, living-giving place, a place of harmony and peace. There was no discord between the people and the animals or, for that matter, between the people; there was no hunger or need of any kind; there was no need for clothing or shelter; there was no illness or death; war and conflict were unknown. Simple expressions like "getting up on the wrong side of the bed" had no meaning. Adam and Eve were nude, yet felt comfortable within themselves; they would only learn about nakedness and shame. Everything was provided for them. They were embraced in the goodness, grace, and love of God.

Ponder that picture for a moment and ask yourself: Could you live in the Garden of Eden? Even if you got out of bed on the right side, would you have any reason to do so? Would your world change if you got up and going or not? It seems reasonable to say, in the Garden of Eden you would have little if any sense of agency; God was giving to you and doing for you everything, literally. We could say, imagining the Garden of Eden from our present perspective, that life has an empty feeling about. Equally, we could ask ourselves, while surrounded by all this love, grace and goodness, is this all there is to human life? In at least one way, the Garden of Eden story supports asking such questions. A conversation arises between the serpent and Eve. Eve is asked if there are boundaries she is not to cross, and Eve speaks of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. Eve didn't give much thought to sinning, she did seek more knowledge about being a human being in relationship with God, about being fully human. Eve and Adam eat of the fruit of that tree.

Her curiosity launches the remainder of the Hebrew and Christian Bible. What will God do to nourish and maintain a relationship with human being who have agency, freedom, and knowledge? According to the biblical narrative, God explores different avenues. We learn about Noah and the flood; God calls a people beginning with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and promises a land where they can be God's People; in the contingencies of life, the people end up in slavery in Egypt, oppressed and enslaved, and God hears their cries

of distress; Moses responds to God's call to lead the people out of slavery, by way of forty years in the wilderness while learning how to be God's People; the land is given and the people settle it, build a city, Jerusalem, and build a temple; there are conflicts among God's People, they are defeated in war and become slaves again; by the time of Jesus they are living under the thumb of the Romans.

Running through all of the entire story is the relationship between God and God's people. To be fully human is to know sin, what separates us from God. To be fully God is to be generous with the grace that makes this relationship work, a relationship within which life is given, discovered, and lived.

Christian belief brings us to Jesus and the empty tomb. Jesus' cross and his death brings us to the ultimate that separates us from God; Jesus joins us in death. Jesus' empty tomb tells us even death can't rupture our relationship with God. We can be flawed human beings and still know the life-giving grace of God. Resurrection, we might note is not a small gift. Resurrection is not synonymous with restoration or resuscitation. Restoration is about returning something to what it was before; resuscitation concerns bringing something back to life. Resurrection speaks to being raised to something unique, that didn't exist before, a new, fulfilling relationship between God and humans. Resurrection and its promise offers us hope in the midst of a life-threatening pandemic; it speaks not to restoration of the old, or resuscitation to the old. Resurrection points us towards a new our gracious God will help us create as we follow in Jesus' way.

Have a grace filled Easter.

Bill