

Sermon: 2020/05/24 (7th Sunday of Easter, Year A - ASCENSION) - Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10,33-36; 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11; &, John 17:1-11_BTR

[Invite children to the front.]

There is - I know you know, right now, a virus going around, making people ill. It's a tiny-whiney, teensie-weensie, (microscopic) "creature," and it moves between its victims in coughs - [Urgh! Pass a Covid-19 prop from near mouth to a child's hand, to hold.]

And sneezes [A-choo! Repeat above].

And by touch.

And you might be feeling scared or nervous at the thought of this - especially since it is pretty much invisible.

And you might be wondering: "Why?!"

(Why does God allow such a thing to happen?

Why doesn't He protect us all from bad things like Covid-19?)

Well, our epistle today - that's a letter, written by the Apostle Peter, one of Jesus very *closest* friends, was sent to Christians thousands of years ago who were worried and hurting like we are.

But it wasn't a virus after them.

It was people!

"People" who hated them for loving Jesus.

Those "people" were stoning them to death, and calling them rude names.

And so the (first) Christians probably asked similar questions of God and His ministers like we are:

"Why?!"

But Peter turns this question "around," saying: 'Rejoice!' [4:13a]

(That means; "celebrate.")

Instead of worrying about these "bad things," celebrate them!

Celebrate that these "bad things" remind you that God Himself became like us (in the form of Jesus) and *also* suffered them - *to set us free; to prepare us for when* '[H]is glory is revealed' [4:13b] on the Day of Judgement.

Let's pray:

[Ask children to return to their seats.]

The Gospel promise is that, one day, Jesus will return to the creation He made (at

the beginning of time [Jn. 1:3]), and rule it *directly* - not as a meek, suffering "lamb," who turned the other cheek to those jealous, jaded murderers who nailed Him to a cross, but "directly" *as a king; as a conqueror!* [See Rev. 19:11f.] One with a throne, and a crown, a sword and a palace - the New Jerusalem. In which the redeemed - perhaps you and I - the *true* Christians - will live forever, sickness-free and ageless.

Surrounded by natural beauty.

Everything - the animals, the plants and humanity - maintained in its proper balance by Christ's gentle, omnipotent "hand."

By His government.

In the most *literal* sense of that term.

That His [point up] will 'will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.'

It sounds like a "pipe dream," doesn't it?

A (children's) fairytale?

And yet this *is* what the reality of the empty tomb - [Mt. 28:1-7] an undeniable historical fact - suggests waits on the "horizon."

A tomb that was left empty so that the Savior could ascend and resume His place *within* the Trinitarian godhead, as we celebrate today: [Acts 1:9-10a].

The "Gospel promise," in other words, is one of perfection.

Life as it should be(!), but - *clearly* - isn't.

So, what are we to do?

In the interim, that is.

(Until Jesus returns.)

Do we sit idly?

Is the church's calling to remain in a permanent, introverted "lockdown"?

To be frozen in quarantine irrespective of viruses or whatever?

You know the answer!

- '...be my witnesses to Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth.' [Acts 1:8]

(We are commanded.)

The word "witnesses" - μάρτυρες - in Greek, means to *testify*.

To testify - to declare - to proclaim and share with others - that something is true: specifically, that Christ is risen, alleluia!)

But many of us seem to have forgotten that.

(Even before "social distancing" was necessary.)

Many of us - if we had been observed by cultural anthropologists, that is - would have given those observers; the "anthropologists" the impression that we thought Jesus had told us to sit quietly.

- to "sit quietly" and *repress* the exciting news that the grave has been overcome, and a posthumous, *marvellous* fate awaits those who confess and seize-a-hold of it.

Those "anthropologists" might be forgiven for thinking that we think that that "truth" is a *private* possession.

Almost a shameful one, like a *Penthouse* or a *Playboy* that a teenage-boy smuggles around in backpack or hides under the bed.
But to treat our faith - our excitement - our hope - in this way - like a naughty magazine for "our eyes only" is a betrayal.
It is a betrayal of the one who *will* be king and *is*, in fact, king already.

And what a good king deserves,
a king who is genuinely a servant of His people,
a king who rules and reigns not for selfish purposes but for others; 'on behalf of the world', the Bible makes clear - *that* special person deserves *glory*.
And notice that Jesus has announced the hour to 'glorify' has come: [Jn. 17:1].
It *came* in Gethsemane 2,000 years ago - that's where Jesus was when He said it was 'the hour'.
And so, therefore, it *remains* 'the hour'.
It has been 'the hour' ever since (because what has been done on The Cross can't be undone).
This, then, is 'the hour'.
And the lifting of restrictions;
the restrictions on business and mingling and visiting affords us "a second bite at the cherry."
It's almost like a re-birth.
A "do-over."
And my message to you today is to *embrace* it as such.
A fresh start of seeing and believing more clearly that this is *your* "hour" to show and tell about *our* glorious God.
So *please*, don't just return to "normal."
Don't just get back on the bike of how you were before.
Don't just *fall* into the old routine; the old... "rut."
Ask yourself: "How can I bring glory to God?"
How can *new* habits and a new *attitude* communicate *more* glory for Him (and less for me)?

In all kinds of ways! (Of course.)
But I want to suggest just *one*:
Whilst we've been hiding away from Covid-19, *and* each other, the natural world has had a respite.
(To a small degree.)
I'm sure you've heard the stories, right?
- Of coyotes and dolphins, deer and wild boar enjoying themselves in formerly busy, noisy, *polluted* spaces.
Urban "spaces" - neighbourhoods and town-squares.
Air quality has improved.
Less animals have been killed on the roads.

The environment is finding her footing again...

Well, it is - "the environment" - *all* of it, the Lord's.

We're only its gardeners;

His [point up] gardeners.

Yes, we're supposed to exercise "dominion" in the universe as it says in *Genesis*:
[Gen. 1:26].

But it is *His* dominion.

He is *the* "domus" - that's Latin: the king we described.

And the "dominion" we're granted to share in is *supposed* to be a foretaste of the dominion *He* will impose at the General Resurrection.

We are, you see, therefore, like substitute teachers.

The lesson we teach is the Gospel: of forgiveness and life-after-death for sinners.

But how can justify *trashing* the classroom whilst the *real* "teacher" waits to join us from another, 'far better' place? [Phil. 1:23]

We can't.

Therefore, as you are "born again" into the emerging post-Covid, post-shuttered America,

make *one* way of glorifying God by re-committing yourself to recycling,

to "green" initiatives,

to purchasing "compostables" and "renewables" rather than made-in-China plastics.

To walking instead of driving.

To beeswax wrapping-paper and LEDs.

To organic, free-range food.

To using sun-screen that doesn't poison marine-reefs.

To cotton and wool rather than polyester.

(One could go on but you get the idea.)

Let's be a part of massive cultural change in this country, where people consume less - of everything, including energy-hungry media.

And spend more time 'sing[ing] praises' to God the King, like those in the Psalm:
[68:4].