

The Fifth Sunday in Lent – Year B – The Rev. Canon Joan Anthony 3.21.21  
Jeremiah 31:31-34, Psalm 119:9-16, Hebrews 5:5-10, John 12:20-33

We are fast approaching Easter, the Feast of the Resurrection. But Resurrection is not only a one-time event that happened 2000+ years ago. It is not or at least not only the yearly remembrance of those events in which the Son of God died so that death might be conquered once and for all.

The Resurrection that we celebrate changed the world for ever. But resurrection also happens daily in our lives it can even happen hourly or minute by minute. Resurrection happens each time we recognize the humanity in a homeless person, each time we contribute food that our neighbors may know that they will not go hungry. Resurrection happens each time we bring God's love into the world to someone who is in need. It happens when we risk saying "I'm sorry" or "I was wrong" or perhaps hardest of all, "Please forgive me".

Resurrection is not without cost, however. Before there can be resurrection there must be crucifixion and death. Crucifixions are many and varied in human history. Our society is coming to a reckoning with regard to racial and economic justice. Soon, if not already, the people of color will outnumber the people who trace their heritage to Northern Europe. That demographic change is a crucifixion of sorts that is coming, a crucifixion of view and fear for those who are Caucasian and a crucifixion of a different fear and different outlook for those who are of color. The economic divide between the few wealthiest individuals in our country and those who hungry, homeless or barely surviving is growing. This gulf affects people of all colors. What allows racial and economic injustice to continue in our country among people of good will is hurt and fear. Only when we can begin to see the fear and hurt of the other and express our fear and hurt honestly can there be death to injustice and a resurrection of unity of purpose in our nation. Only then can we truly experience the truth of our Pledge of Allegiance.

We are most of us of an age when it was still the custom to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance each morning in our elementary schools. Remember how it went. "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." One Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Resources and programs are important to achieving this promise of liberty and justice for all. But programs and resources are not enough and will never solve the disparity alone. What is required is a change of heart of the nation and the individuals who make up this nation.

The prophet Jeremiah so many centuries ago, would have understood the words of our pledge. Words that seek unity, liberty and justice under God. "No one should ever have to see what Jeremiah saw. What other prophets had foreseen and warned about, and hoped against hope would never happen, Jeremiah saw with his own eyes. He saw Jerusalem laid in ruin by Nebuchadnezzar's raging army..." so describes the setting for our reading this morning. The temple where God was present in the Holy of Holies had been desecrated and destroyed. God appeared to have gone, abandoning Israel to her fate. It was a time of crucifixion for the whole people. In the middle of the worst disaster that could possibly be imagined, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. "The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

A new covenant to be written on our hearts, that is the promise of God to us in our time as well. A new covenant of mercy, justice and peace. This covenant will not only be between

God and us, but a covenant between all of the people first of our nation and then of the world. That is the resurrection hope that we all long for, the resurrection hope that lies beyond the hard work of crucifixion and death.

Resurrection hope does not mean that we as a nation are not severely divided and that this will somehow be miraculously healed. It does not mean that having somehow lost our way, the way back will somehow be easy and without pain.

Resurrection hope means that God will change our hearts if we will allow it to happen. The new covenant to be written on our hearts will be a covenant of grace. It is by grace, the grace of God that true change will happen. Then, in the words of the prophet, Amos, justice will “roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream,”

Grace is one of those theological concepts that is a paradox. We are saved by grace. Saved not only for eternal life but saved for the re-creation of the world in the way that God desires. The paradox of this saving grace is that God could simply destroy this world and create a new, fresh and clean creation just as God threatened to do in the time of Noah and the flood. But God chooses not to do what God unquestionably has the power to do. Instead, God chooses grace, the gift of a covenant written on our hearts that will bring the world back to a place fully in spiritual union with the Creator.

The risk that God takes is that grace is a free gift and depends on our accepting this gift, changing in our hearts and acting on that change. We are the agents of the re-creation of the world that is God’s design. We can say no to the offer God makes. This is the offer that God made in sending Jesus into the world. It is the offer that Jesus, the Son of God made in accepting crucifixion and death so that our own small crucifixions can lead us to resurrected life.

As Jesus, knowing that he is in danger speaks to his disciples of what lies ahead of him. “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

We are the grains of wheat, all of us of whatever color or economic circumstance. In dying to what holds us captive, what crucifies us we will together be the bearers of much fruit in our nation and in the world. In so dying and being resurrected to new life we glorify God. The dying and rising again into new life is what the covenant of grace means in our lives. Dying and rising again to new life is what our divided nation needs and longs for. One nation under God, indivisible with justice and liberty for all. That is the hope of the covenant of grace God offers. The hope of resurrection, or real change is possible if we will one by one say yes to God.