

Easter 4a 2020
May 3, 2020
The Church of the Redeemer
Acts 2:42-47 Psalm 23 1 Peter 2:19-25 John 10:1-10

Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

I know that my Redeemer lives ...

How is your Easter season going? I would really like to know if you are feeling the presence of the risen Lord and what that experience feels like. This year, it might be that the reality of Christ among us feels like wilting Easter flowers in the heat of the day, of unwatered plants in the isolation time of this pandemic. It might be that this time apart is balm to your spirit, a respite in a way of living that had been rushed, even frenetic. It might be that you are still going to work, or still working at home, and that day-to-day life is somewhat “usual.”

Wherever you are in mind and body, in “heart and mind and strength,” the Lord is risen and is with you. Let’s look at where we find ourselves in biblical history -

The psalm writer assures us that we can be in the valley of the shadow of death – are you there? – and God is with us.

⁴Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

God is with us, from ancient times to now, offering protection from evil; there is no need to fear being in this valley. God comforts us in God’s ways. The last several days, sunny and temperate, are a place in which I find God’s comfort and gifts. How about you? Put down your fear, if only for a moment, and feel God in the early summer world around us. Can someone summon an “alleluia” in these days? Step away from any worries, calm yourselves with whatever is beautiful, calming, around you. God is there. (whisper) Alleluia.

Peter’s words come from the context of diaspora; Jews have been exiled from Jerusalem and are living all over the place, not together, and not near the spiritual and tangible home of their faith (the Temple). We are at home and not worshipping in “the home of our faith,” in the physical church ... and our faith life is different, not easy. We are separate from our fellow believers in weekly worship, in weekly sustenance. Peter writes that we can have hope in the living Christ, that what we might suffer purifies our faith. These are words of hope when we remember that we are following Jesus’ footsteps. Jesus who suffered entrusted himself to God. We are to entrust these times and ourselves to God. God knows that we are suffer and how we suffer. And our healing has already come in the person, death, and resurrection of Jesus; we still can hold onto our healer. “By his wounds you have

been healed.” You are healed. Be comforted. Fill our life, this life at this time, with hope. Let your suffering bring you closer to the One who heals; lean into that sweet, eternal embrace.

In this portion of the gospel Jesus is speaking. Then and as the risen Christ, who is Jesus? Shepherd. Gate. Jesus is our gate to life. Jesus lets us in, Jesus sends us out into the world. For now, we are in the sheepfold, cared for by a loving shepherd. We are gathered as Christians in the sheepfold of one shepherd, one God. Lean into this moment, and into the feelings that it brings. Grow in this time. Lament in this time, and from the depths we are made whole. Jesus is the Son of Man, Messiah, Shepherd, and Gate. Our lives are already forever changed because we follow him. We have come into the fold through Jesus – that’s baptism – and we are never abandoned, but sealed as Christ’s own forever.

When I think about God as Shepherd, Gate, Comforter, and give some time to the many ways in which we might experience God on a given day, then I can believe it is Easter. Celebrate with me. Dwell in those places that bring you the presence of God: in prayer, in song, in quiet, in work, sunshine or shade. In God’s presence our time apart is transformed just as Jesus longs to transform us. We are being given a gift of time to understand lament, and to build our hunger and thirst for living fully

into our Christian life. Learn from the hunger and yearning; find God within it. We are filled now in new ways. Remember to live this life, the one to which we are called right now, in scattered sheepfolds, and find God, the one shepherd and guardian of our souls.

Jesus came that we may have life, and have life abundantly. Now. In Easter. At home and together in new ways. Savor *this* life; live *this* life. For I know that my Redeemer lives. Join the celebration! Alleluia!

Amen.