

# The Third Sunday of Easter

Year B

Saint Paul's Episcopal Church/La Iglesia Episcopal de la Resurrección

Mount Vernon, WA

April 14, 2024

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The Psalm today starts out with a lament <sup>2</sup> "You mortals, how long will you dishonor my glory; how long will you worship dumb idols and run after false gods?" Yet; <sup>6</sup> "Many are saying, "Oh, that we might see better times!" We are being bombarded from all directions with all sorts of negative information and detail, to the point of overload of our survival hormone response.

Lent ended in March and Easter Season arrives as we move into April, a month that brings to mind many events that point to the cry of "Oh, that we might see better times!". For one thing, April is Genocide Awareness Month, the Armenian genocide started on April 24, 1915, the Cambodian genocide under Pol Pot began on April 17, 1975, and the Rwandan genocide erupted on April 7, 1994. Yom HaShoah (or "Holocaust Remembrance Day"), moves with Passover, but is observed each year in April or May. (May 6, 2024 this year)

Another event in April is Earth Day, April 22, and this will be the 54th observance of the celebration and teach-in of and about the earth and what we have done and not done to maintain the

earth for and with the inhabitants of Turtle Island. Our track record has not been good. Chief Seattle warns us: 'Man does not weave this web of life. He is merely a strand of it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.'

A theme that runs through the readings for this Sunday and helps to name the darkness, hopelessness and apathy in the world is sin. A word for the worship of dumb idols and running after false gods. That word that is not heard much in homilies and sermons because it has been weaponized and corrupted by those who would create fear, hate, internet clicks, and donations, Fire and brimstone preachers have weaponized the language of sin to diminishing people's conceptions of themselves, branding their hearers as depraved sinners, unworthy of love or inclusion.

There are pastoral, theological and plain old good reasons to stay away from "turn or burn" sermons. But it is the uncomfortable confronting of sin that is a necessary part of the story, and these texts say something about the nature of sin.

1 John is not talking about individual sin. The English translation from the Greek does not adequately convey the sense of John's Greek verb which conveys a corporeality not heard in the English. John and Peter pointing toward a life of sin dedicated to "lawlessness" not so much individual but a corporate turning away from justice to the way of mob violence and justice.

We humans are social creatures and we need to be in relationship and in contact with each other. Currently we are trying to heal from the trauma of COVID. How many of the problems in the world or in our communities arise from mob-like behavior? The bullying and now cyber-bullying can be so traumatizing and painful that it can lead to suicide or violently acting-out by the targeted one.

When change, transition, and disruption becomes too much humans look for scapegoats and to dehumanize the other, those they are fearful of and feel threatened by, “you have to teach your children well.” The history of the United States is marred by the formation of lynch mobs preying upon vulnerable people — Asian immigrants, Black Americans, Catholics, LGBTQ2S+ people, and Native Americans. We are wrestling with our history as some try to bring reconciliation and others cannot accept the changing story and work to deny it. Every war and every conflict relies on the individual surrendering their morality to a violent mob.

Peter basically tell those surrounding him in the Temple after the curing the lame man in the name of God, through Jesus whom “you” rejected and turned over to Rome to be crucified but this is to fulfill what the prophets spoke of. The answer to this is to repent, turn from mob rule and return to God and the covenant God made with humans. Because in turning to God and the covenant means if you live in God you turn toward justice and God’s power will overcome sin.

“Sinner” is not an identity We are not sinners at our core 1 John is clear about that; “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are...Beloved, we are God's children now.” Repentance and forgiveness go hand-in-hand and are to be proclaimed to all nations. The good news of this proclamation from Luke reveals as Peter identifies sin as corporate being derived from the mob mentality which can hijack not only our critical thinking but our morality as well redemption happens when we live out our identity as God’s kin. This relationship causes a change, not only in our perception of the world, but in our relationships, which will start to shift.

Instead of seeing the other that needs to be dehumanized because I perceive a false threat, we see as God sees, we seek as God seeks looking to show love and mercy, not death and destruction. As Cornel West puts it “Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public.” And Julian of Norwich; 'It was necessary that there should be sin; but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.'

These text attest that God came in love to give life. Not the kind of love humans usually live and operate from but that deep abiding love that allows God incarnate in Jesus so loved us that he gave his life so that we may live. We were called to live into that love. There are real, material harms perpetrated in the world. We name that as sin. And we proclaim that sin is not the

end of the story. there is yet hope. We proclaim who we are: a people whose identity is grounded in a divine love that pulls us out of our darkest days and from our darkest impulses. As 1 John says, “We should be called children of God. And that is what we are.”