

Easter 2

Morning Prayer A

First Lesson: Isa 40:1-11

Second Lesson: Luke 24:36-49

Homily

*"The voice said, Cry.
And he said, What shall I cry?
All flesh is grass,
and all the goodliness thereof
is as the flower of the field:
The grass withereth,
the flower fadeth:
because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it:
surely the people is grass.
The grass withereth,
the flower fadeth:
but the word of our God shall stand for ever. "*

"I've got good news and I've got bad news," goes the popular saying,
"Which do you want first?"

In the Old Testament reading today (which, by the way, we usually associate with St. John the Baptist and the season of Advent),

we hear very clear instructions on that. God tells His prophet to give the bad news first, to talk about death and destruction, about sin and disobedience, about the certainty that, left to ourselves, we would be doomed. That is harsh and unpleasant. No one likes to hear it, but, if we're really in that much trouble, and we just don't know it, how are we going to look for help?

This is Eastertide, a time of shouting and celebration, a time of rescue and redemption. He has risen from the dead! He's alive and death is defeated! We are saved!

People like to hear that much. "I'm OK, You're OK" was the title of a popular self-help book. Pulpits everywhere ring out with assurances of God's love, of gentle Jesus, meek and mild, who wouldn't ever condemn anyone. We just plain hate to be told that we are in trouble, and that it's our own fault, and that God is not pleased.

Well, the good news is true.

God IS love, and He does want to save us,
but, you know, Easter did not come
until the Cross, in all its horror, had been seen.
We are not saved until we recognize the horror
of the sin and rebellion in our own lives,
until we admit that we need help,
until, like a drowning man,,
we actually reach out for the life preserver.
If we don't know the bad news,
we won't experience the good news.

*"...surely the people is grass.
The grass withereth,
the flower fadeth:
but the word of our God shall stand for ever. "*

And that is bad news
if we are determined to have our own way,
for God doesn't change His mind.
What He has declared righteous is righteous,
and what he has called evil is evil;
but it is good news
if we will accept what He offers us,
if we will admit our sin, ask forgiveness,
seek a change in our lives,
and accept the gift of salvation,
in His Word, in His Sacraments,
in His silent presence within.

What His word condemns is condemned,
but whoever His word accepts is accepted.

The disciples had seen the horrors of His death.
In so doing they had seen the horrors
inside themselves.
Their sorrow and hopelessness
could not have been greater.
That was the bad news,
and it was true.
But there He was,
in their midst.
Everything was changed!
The Good News had come:
He was alive!
They were saved!

*"O Zion, that bringest good tidings,
get thee up into the high mountain;
O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings,
lift up thy voice with strength;
lift it up, be not afraid;
say unto the cities of Judah,
Behold your God!"*

He made them wait,
until the Holy Ghost came upon them,
but He has come upon the Church.

That's us.

We have bad news and we have good news,
and the world needs to hear.

What's keeping us?

Let us pray.

O God, who willest that all men should be saved,
and come to the knowledge of the truth: send forth,
we beseech thee, labourers into thy harvest, and
enable them to speak the word with boldness; that
thy word may run and be glorified, and that all
nations may know thee, the one true God, and him
whom thou hast sent, even Jesus Christ thy Son our
Lord. Amen.

Easter 2

Morning Prayer B

First Lesson: Baruch 4:21-30

Second Lesson: Phil 3:7-16

Homily

We are in the season of Eastertide.

The mood is one of great celebration.

The long and somber fast of Lent is well behind us.

We spent forty days in preparation

for the joy of Easter,

remembering how, from the beginning of creation,

the whole earth groaned and travailed

until the coming of that day.

But that day has come.

Our celebration of that day has come.

The Prayer Book has us say,

"Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us ...

Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more ...

Christ is risen from the dead ...

in Christ shall all be made alive."

But here we are,

three weeks into this time of unrestrained joy,

and both of our Bible lessons

talk about what hasn't yet happened.

"... he will save you ..." says Baruch, and writes of

"... the mercy which shall soon come unto you ...

... suffer patiently ...", he says, and

"... Be of good comfort, O my children, and cry unto God:

*for ye shall be remembered of him
that brought these things upon you. ...*

*Take a good heart, O Jerusalem:
for he ... will comfort thee ..."*

"... that I may win Christ ...", says St. Paul,

"... That I may know him ...

... if by any means

I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

Not as though I had already attained ..."

and says of himself,

*"I press toward the mark for the prize
of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*

But wasn't all that settled on the Cross,
and sealed by the Resurrection?

Aren't we the community of the redeemed?

Doesn't "It is finished" mean what it says?

Of course.

It is settled, sealed, finished.

Our salvation has been accomplished.

Sin and death and Satan himself

have been conquered.

*Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory
in our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen. Alleluia!*

That is all true,
but have you noticed that we're still here?

That we're still
in the midst of a really troubled world?

That evil still seems to be very much a presence,
all around us, even in us?

We all still sin.

That's why we say the General Confession.

That's why the church provides Private Confession.

That's why we have Lent every year.

That's why we have to examine ourselves,
and why we always find things to confess,
things that need to change.

We don't feel very saintly, because we're not,
but we are called to be saints,
and the price has been paid,
and the work is going on,
if only we don't refuse it.

In the midst of a troubled world,
facing more dangers and problems
than most of us can imagine,
struggling with his own internal sin and weakness,

full well aware of how imperfect this world,
and, yes, he himself, still remain,
St. Paul cried out with confidence:

*"... That I may know him,
and the power of his resurrection,
and the fellowship of his sufferings,
being made conformable unto his death;*

He put it all into Christ's hands,
knowing that the Saviour is more than able
to take all the ugliness, all the weakness, all the sin,
and to nail it to that Cross,
in that same Sacrifice
into which we enter at every Eucharist,
and to raise us up in His own Resurrection,
unto everlasting life.

In Baruch's words:

*"Be of good cheer, O my children,
cry unto the Lord, and he will deliver you
from the power and hand of the enemies.
For my hope is in the Everlasting,
that he will save you;*

*and joy is come unto me from the Holy One,
because of the mercy which shall soon come
unto you from the Everlasting our Saviour. "*

Let us pray.

O most loving Father, who willest us to give thanks for all things, to dread nothing but the loss of thee, and to cast all our care on thee, who carest for us; Preserve us from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, and grant that no clouds of this mortal life may hide from us the light of that love which is immortal, and which thou has manifested unto us in thy Son, Jesus Christ our risen Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Easter 2

Evening Prayer A

First Lesson: Ezek 34:11-16, 30-31

Second Lesson: John 21:1-19

Homily

Peter was a fisherman by trade,
as were James and John and his brother Andrew,
and we don't know how many of the others.

Seven of them were gathered
there in their home country
on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Yes, the Lord was risen.

They'd all seen him,
and surely they hoped to see him again.

But they had no guidance
as to what they should do next.

He's told them to wait,
and that is what they were doing,
but waiting didn't fill the time.
and it didn't put food on the table.

So Peter fell back on what he knew.
Maybe he even remembered
how the Lord had said
that he would fish for men.
Perhaps his old job

had some relation to what was to come.

We heard the story.

They fished all night with no success.
Jesus appeared and gave them fish
where there were none,
and ate with them.

Afterwards he confused poor Peter terribly.
"Do you love me? Feed my sheep."
"What? Of course I love you,
but I'm a fisherman,
not a shepherd."

It's interesting. To be a fisherman is a good thing.
There's a lot of adventure and a satisfying result.
A fisherman goes looking for fish, catches them,
and brings them home. It's worthwhile,
but when he delivers the fish, his job is done.
Fishing for men is like that.

It's going out to find those the Lord is calling.
It's winning them and bringing them home.
Every Christian is called to do that to some degree,
but those who think winning the lost
is the only thing we need to do
have missed the point.

"Feed my sheep," He said.

The Apostles and the Church that follows them

aren't simply running a warehouse for the fish.
 Our calling is to be shepherds.
 To care for God's sheep.
 To feed them with divine food,
 both in Word and in Sacraments,
 and to lead them to the place they are called to be.
 Yes, our clergy, as successors to the Apostles,
 are responsible for us,
 but we are also responsible for each other.

To Peter, to the other Apostles,
 to the bishops, priests, and deacons,
 and to every member of the Church,
 Our Lord continues to call:
 "Do you love me? Feed my sheep."

Ezekiel takes it another direction.
 God is described as the Shepherd.
 It is He that calls the sheep
 from all the widely separated places
 to which they have wandered.
 Ezekiel seems to have foreseen our day,
 the day when those called by the Name of Christ
 are separated into a thousand separate flocks,
 flocks that have little if anything
 to do with each other,
 and seem perfectly content
 that it continue that way.

But the Shepherd says this:

*"As a shepherd seeketh out his flock
 in the day that he is among his sheep
 that are scattered;
 so will I seek out my sheep,
 and will deliver them out of all places
 where they have been scattered
 in the cloudy and dark day. "*

Our Lord prayed on the same night
 that He gave us the Holy Eucharist,
 the same night that He was betrayed
 to die for our sins,
"That they all may be one..."

We are Continuing Anglicans.
 We ran, and rightly so,
 from an increasingly poisonous environment.
 We had a lot to oppose,
 and we successfully opposed it.
 But it becomes all too easy (doesn't it?)
 to identify ourselves by who and what we are not,
 to spend our lives looking backward,
 hiding in our separate little enclaves,
 and never hearing the voice of the Shepherd
 who is always calling His sheep
 to come to Him.

to be fed by Him,
forever.

Listen, Church.

Hear His voice, It is us He is calling,
and our only task is to follow the Voice.

Let us pray:

Risen Lord, may we hear thy voice,
hearing, may we follow,
and, following, come unto everlasting life. Amen.

Easter 2

Evening Prayer B

First Lesson: 2 Esdras 8:20-30, 46, 51-54

Second Lesson: 1 Cor 15:12-23

Homily

*"But now is Christ risen from the dead,
and become the firstfruits of them that slept.
For since by man came death,
by man came also the resurrection of the dead.
For as in Adam all die,
even so in Christ shall all be made alive. "*

So proclaimed St. Paul.

So proclaimed Holy Church from the earliest days.
So also we proclaim
to our own age and in our own time.

*Christ is risen , alleluia!
He is risen indeed, alleluia!
Because He lives, we shall live also*

This is our message.

This is what we celebrate.

This is what we are called to proclaim
from the housetops,

to carry in our hearts as we walk,
as we sit, as we labor,
to teach our children,
to proclaim with thanksgiving in our worship..
It's known as the gospel, the Good News,
and it is positive and it is simple.
God loved a sinful mankind
that deserved condemnation.
Rather than condemn us,
as would have been just,
He sent His Son to open a way
of forgiveness and salvation.
Jesus became man, died and rose again.

By repentance,
acceptance of His gift, and of His will,
we are admitted to fellowship with Him,
to the supernatural world of sacraments,
and ultimately to everlasting life.

Once we are in fellowship with our God
and His Church,
we are his messengers, every one of us,
and our message is not one of condemnation,
but of invitation.

Yes, we sometimes need
to point out the sins and errors
that abound in this world around us,

but for a purpose,
as a call, through repentance,
to the presence of God.

It cannot be our objective to condemn,
any more than that is God's objective,
but rather to save as He has shown
in the powerful events of cross and resurrection.

We have seen evil.
We live in a world that justifies and even promotes
what is wrong in God's sight.
We have watched as large segments of His Church
have altered and denied His revelation.
We have rightly walked away from all that,
but sometimes it looks as though our whole identity,
our whole message, our entire effort
is bound up in what we oppose,
what we denounce,
what awful things they are doing back where we
came from,
in other words, on what we are not.

Did you listen closely
to the wonderful prayer of Esdras
in our First Lesson today?
We overheard him praying,
among other things,
this:

*“O look not upon the sins of thy people;
but on them which serve thee in truth.
Regard not the wicked inventions of the heathen,
but the desire of those
that keep thy testimonies in afflictions.
Think not upon those
that have walked feignedly before thee:
but remember them,
which according to thy will have known thy fear.
Let it not be thy will
to destroy them which have lived like beasts;
but to look upon them
that have clearly taught thy law.
Take thou no indignation
at them which are deemed worse than beasts;
but love them that always put their trust in thy
righteousness and glory.*

The prophet sees very clearly indeed
that a large part of the people has forsaken God.
He very clearly
distinguishes the faithful remnant from them.
He pointedly refuses
to spend time denouncing them
or even praying against them.
Instead he prays for those who are faithful.

In many other places, in both Testaments,
the disobedient and unbelieving are called to God,
and His judgment is proclaimed,
but always there is invitation.

The rebels are not hated.

The righteous are not defined
by their hatred for them.

But the risen Christ calls.

He calls those who are dead in their sins.

He calls those who are beginning to stray.

And He calls those who are trying to follow.

And for all men, all women, all children,

His call is to resurrection,

to new life,

to a turning of the eyes and the thoughts to Him,

and a walking away

from the things that would ensnare us.

Let us pray in the word of next Sunday's collect:

Almighty God, who shonest to them that are in error
the light of thy truth, to the intent that they may
return into the way of righteousness; Grant unto all
those who are admitted into the fellowship of
Christ's Religion, that they may avoid those things
that are contrary to their profession, and follow all
such things as are agreeable to the same; through our
Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.