

Easter 3

Morning Prayer A

First Lesson: 2 Sam 12:15b-23

Second Lesson: John 14:1-14

Homily

In our first lesson we come into the middle of a story.

King David had sinned grievously.

We won't go into that, but now, as a result ... his baby son is terribly sick.

David, believing it to be his fault,
is passionate in his prayer,
fasting, and sleeping on the ground.
Finally, after a week, the child died.
Everyone expected David to be shocked and upset,
and to go into deep mourning at the news,
but, instead, he got up, dressed and bathed,
broke his fast, and resumed his normal activity.
"He's gone now. I can't change that," he said,
"He's not coming back to me,
but I will go to him."

How many of us have lost dearly beloved ones?
Was it an easy thing?

Some of us watched a long and sad decline,
doing everything we could to keep the end from
coming,

laboring, worrying, praying,
but unsuccessfully.

Others were overtaken suddenly by the loss.

How many of us had a faith like David's,
a faith that accepts what is and trusts God.

"I'll go to him," he said,
and went about his business until that day.

"In my Father's house are many mansions:"
said Jesus in the second lesson,
"if it were not so, I would have told you."

There's no news here.
David knew that already.
How?

He knew the character of God.
He trusted in His goodness.
Jesus didn't say, "You know it because I told you."

He said instead, "You already know it.
If what you know were not true, I'd tell you."

But here comes the news.

I go to prepare a place for you."

He came into the world,
 A prophet like other prophets.
 He declared the Word of the Lord.
 He announced the judgment of God
 on a disobedient people.
 He proclaimed the invitation to repentance.
 He pointed us to the kingdom of God.
 But He did more, because He was more,
 no mere prophet, but God the Son of God,
 not merely a messenger, but the Way

As He said to Thomas,

*"I am the way, the truth, and the life:
 no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

For all the pointing of all the prophets,
 it remains true that we are weak, flawed, and sinful,
 and totally unable to do what must be done
 if we are to reach that final goal,
 but He, the Lord, became a man,
 and, as a man, trod the paths of death,
 and suffered them for us,
 after which He broke those bonds,
 rose again, and goes before us,
 to make us welcome forever.

He is the way.
 By the path He opened,
 by the pains He suffered for us,
 by the Blood He poured out for us,
 by the cross on which he died,
 by the tomb in which his lifeless body lay,
 by His glorious triumph over death,
 He has become the Way,
 and that Way leads on to glories unimagined.

*"Verily, verily, I say unto you," He says,
 "He that believeth on me,
 the works that I do shall he do also;"*

And we may respond,

*"Yea, though I walk through the valley
 of the shadow of death,
 I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."*

And we follow Him on the path He prepared,
 In His Truth, in His life,
 to the place where David knew He would go,
 where his son awaited,
 where, perhaps some of our loved ones wait,
 and where, above all, He awaits,
 the one who loved us enough to die and rise again.

Let us pray.

O Lord Jesus Christ, who art the way and the truth and the life, look upon us poor sinners and stir up in us, by thy cross and resurrection, the lively hope of everlasting redemption, thou who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Easter 3

Morning Prayer B

First Lesson: 1 Sam 2:1-10

Second Lesson: Acts 2:22-36

Homily

Did the Old Testament sound familiar this morning?
It should have.

These words are very much like other words
that are at the heart of Prayer Book worship:
The Magnificat, Mary's song,
the words with which she celebrated
the soon-coming birth of God's Son and hers,
the words provided to be used every day
at Evening Prayer.

The Mother of our Lord apparently knew Scripture,
and based her words upon those of Hannah,
sung by another woman at another time,
in celebration of another surprising birth.

Have you paid close attention to the Magnificat,
to what it actually says?

Or to this morning's reading?.

This is not an innocuous praise song.

It certainly is more than just pretty words.

This is radical stuff.

It's about a world to be turned upside down,

or, rather, about an upside-down world,
that God will soon set right.

It's a song sung by a barren woman
about to have a baby,
and by a teen-age Mom,.
whose unborn child is not her husband's.

It's a song about raising up the poor,
setting the beggar among princes,
putting down the mighty,
overturning the power structure of a sinful world,
manifesting God's nature, God's mercy,
God's righteousness
among those who serve their own interests,
their own overweening pride.

It was strong medicine
in the mouths of those two women.
And Holy Church
has administered strong medicine
in putting these words in our mouths.

We really don't want to think
about what we're saying.

We don't want to let go of whatever status we have.

We don't want the work of God
to take anything from us.

But that is what we need.

This is a world dead in sin,

a world that allows God to be eclipsed,
 hidden behind all our petty desires,
 pushed out of the way and ignored.
 But ignoring God leads to destruction.
 We destroy the goodness He has provided here.
 We reject the goodness he will provide hereafter.
 We serve not eternal life,
 but everlasting death.

But Jesus,
 the surprising resident in Mary's womb,
 came into the daylight of this world.
 God submitted Himself to man,
 the Master lived as a servant.
 For the needs of men and women
 He overturned His own creation,
 working miracles
 against the laws He himself had set in motion.
 And finally, the Lord of Creation
 allowed Himself to be killed by mere men.
 Finally?
 Well, not really.
 Even the power of death was overturned.
 Defeat was turned into victory.
 The gates of Hell became, for Him and for us,
 instead the gates to everlasting life.

As St. Peter preached:

*"God hath raised [Him] up,
 having loosed the pains of death:
 because it was not possible
 that he should be holden of it. "*

*"Therefore let all ... know assuredly,
 that God hath made the same Jesus,
 whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

He has risen!
 He has defeated death!
 Nothing is as it was!
 Let us rejoice.

Though it's appointed for Evening Prayer,
 let us say together Mary's song, the Magnificat
 on page 26 of the Prayer Book.

Easter 3

Evening Prayer A

First Lesson: Isa 26:12-16, 19

Second Lesson: 2 Cor 5

Homily

O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us:

Other Lords? Oh, yes!
Perhaps you're thinking of gods
with names like Baal or Dagon,
or Zeus. perhaps Odin or Isis or Kali.,
maybe even Papa Legba, or Coyote.
All the ancient nations,
and those groups we think of today
as backward or primitive,
had imaginary gods, didn't they?
But they weren't real,
and nobody civilized believes in them anyway.
So what's the big deal?
Maybe that is so,
but there are lords, many of them,
that have controlled parts of our lives,
and perhaps still do, if we allow it.
Their names are less exotic, simpler,
starkly plain, for that matter,
names like money, sex, prestige;
all the various possessions
with which our lives are filled,
all the people whose opinion
we value over God's;

our good name, reputation, place in society.
There are more of these 'lords'
than we can possibly name,
and they jostle within us for our attention,
yes, for our worship,
and we bow before them, don't we?
They take a place in our hearts
that belongs only to God.
But hear what Isaiah said about them:

*They are dead, they shall not live;
they are deceased, they shall not rise:
therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them,
and made all their memory to perish.*

False gods are dead gods.
There is no life in them,
and they cannot bestow life on us.
They may seem attractive in the short haul,
but ultimately all they can bring is death.
Their domination drains the life from us
and we die,
but Isaiah has a word for us
at the end of that First Lesson

*Thy dead men shall live,
together with my dead body shall they arise.
Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust:
for thy dew is as the dew of herbs,
and the earth shall cast out the dead*

This is the season of Eastertide.
Christ is risen from the dead
and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

He broke the bonds of death.
He opened the gates of everlasting life.

He calls us from the service of these dead lords,
and sets us free to follow Him,
to know the freedom of the children of God.

as St. Paul wrote:

*we have a building of God,
an house not made with hands,
eternal in the heavens.*

Our security, then,
doesn't come from what we have,
or from what people think of us,
or, for that matter,
from what we think of ourselves.
Our security is in what God has done,
in the Cross and resurrection,
in his invitation and promise.
If we see that,
we can leave behind all the things
on which we depend,
things that chain us to the world and its worries,
and, looking at all these things, say with Paul:

*...we that are in this tabernacle do groan,
being burdened: ...
[desiring] that mortality might be swallowed up of
life. ...
[realizing that] whilst we are at home in the body,
we are absent from the Lord: ...*

*We are confident, I say,
and willing rather to be absent from the body,
and to be present with the Lord.
Wherefore we labour, that,
whether present or absent,
we may be accepted of him.*

What is important is not what we have,
nor is it what we accomplish.
These are dead lords.
All that matters
is that we follow our living Lord, Jesus Christ,

and, as St. Paul said:
*Therefore if any man be in Christ,
he is a new creature:
old things are passed away;
behold, all things are become new.*

Let us pray.

Raise us up, blessed Lord, from our entanglements
with mere things, and turn our eyes upon the face of
thy dear Son, upon His Cross, upon His
Resurrection, and give us grace so to follow Him
that we live as new creatures unto everlasting life;
through the same Christ our Lord. Amen

Easter 3

Evening Prayer B

First Lesson: Wisdom 5:1-6, 14-16

Second Lesson: Luke 20:27-39

Homily

Foolish questions.

It seems that such an enormous amount of energy goes into trying to figure out the answers to questions that never needed to be asked, and simply can't be answered anyway.

One can turn to religious television and hear wild speculations about end times.

When is the Lord coming back?

Which nations will be doing what?

What kind of accidents will driverless cars, or pilotless planes cause,

when the faithful are "raptured away"?

Every last one of these wild-eyed preachers claims that he has the only right answer:

"See, it's right here in my Bible."

Unbelievers do exactly the same thing, though for a different reason,

seeking to "disprove" faith

by attacking some literalistic interpretation of the Scriptures,

often rightfully, as foolish.

That is what Jesus ran across

in the passage from St. Luke.

They wanted to make Him look foolish

by enmeshing him in this kind of vain speculation,

spinning an improbably tale about a woman and seven brothers and marriage in heaven.

"That's not what it's about,"

was the substance of His answer,

"he is not a God of the dead,

but of the living: for all live unto him. "

The Word of God did not come to us

to answer our idle questions,

or to satisfy our curiosity,

but to bring us life,

to lead us out of the death in which we exist,

and restore us to the fullness

for which we were created.

"I am come," He said,

"That ye may have life,

and that ye may have it more abundantly."

From the Wisdom of Solomon,

we heard an interesting two-pronged reading

"Then shall the righteous man

stand in great boldness

before the face of such as have afflicted him,

and made no account of his labours."

Could there be a clearer foreshadowing

of the trials of Our Lord

before the Sanhedrin,

before Pilate, and before Herod?

And what of that wonderful comment that they were

"... amazed at the strangeness of his salvation" ?

What could be a stranger salvation
than the sight of a suffering man
dying on a Cross?

*"This was he," they said,
"whom we had sometimes in derision,
and a proverb of reproach: "*

*We fools accounted his life madness,
and his end to be without honour."*

St. Paul wrote that some
saw the cross as foolishness,
and others as a scandal and stumblingblock.
But, as the Psalmist said,

"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."

We'll never really understand
what went on on the cross.
We'll never unravel the mysteries
of the nature of God.
We won't figure out the events of the future,
but, as we look at His cross and His resurrection,
we see and know and receive
that strange salvation,
and regardless of the questions we may still have,
we can find ourselves
in the second part of that reading:

*For the hope of the ungodly
is like dust that is blown away with the wind;
like a thin froth that is driven away with the storm;
like as the smoke
is dispersed here and there with a tempest,
and passeth away as the remembrance of a guest
that tarrieth but a day.*

*But the righteous live for evermore;
their reward also is with the Lord,
and the care of them is with the most High.
Therefore shall they receive a glorious kingdom,
and a beautiful crown from the Lord's hand:
for with his right hand shall he cover them,
and with his arm shall he protect them.*

Let us pray.

O God, who makest us glad with the weekly
remembrance of the glorious resurrection of thy Son
our Lord; vouchsafe us this day such blessing
through our worship of thee, that the days to come
may be spent in thy service; through the same Jesus
Christ our Lord. Amen.