

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER – 05/24/2020

ACTS 1:6-14; PSALM 68:1-10, 33-36; 1 PETER 4:12-14, 5:6-11

JOHN 17: 1-11

GOOD MORNING

LOOKING BACK OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS, I SEE THAT I HAVE BEEN SHARING WITH YOU MANY MEMORIAL DAY WEEKENDS – NEXT SATURDAY BEING THE TRADITIONAL MEMORIAL DAY – WE ARE SHARING IN *SPIRIT* TODAY

IN OUR LESSONS THIS MORNING, OTHER THAN THE PSALM READING ALL COME FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT, WE HEAR FROM PAUL IN ATHENS, FROM PETER TO NEW CONVERTS THROUGHOUT ASIA, AND ON THIS *EXPECTATION* SUNDAY BETWEEN THE ASCENSION AND PENTACOST THE GOSPEL PASSAGE IS ALWAYS THE *HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER* FROM JOHN.

TODAY’S EPISTLE IS THE FINAL PASSAGE IN THE SERIES OF SEMI-CONTINUOUS READINGS FROM 1 PETER IN THIS EASTER SEASON. WRITTEN DURING A PERIOD OF PERSECUTION IN ASIA MINOR, THE LETTER OFFERS HOPE

AND CONSOLATION TO THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS WHO HAVE ENDURED THE *FIRY ORDEAL* OF SUFFERING.

PAUL DECLARES THAT TO SHARE CHRIST'S SUFFERING IN ITSELF BRINGS NO MERIT; BUT THE SUFFERING THAT ONE ENDURES AS A DISCIPLE GLORIFIES GOD, *SO THAT YOU MAY ALSO BE GLAD AND SHOUT FOR JOY WHEN HIS GLORY IS REVEALED*". BELIEVERS REVILED IN THE NAME OF CHRIST IN ADDITION OF GIVING ASSURANCES OF GOD'S PRESENCE, THE LETTER ALSO OFFERS WAYS THAT BELIEVERS ARE TO RESPOND AND RESIST IN THE FACE OF THIS SUFFERING. FIRST, THEY ARE TO HUMBLE THEMSELVES BEFORE ALMIGHTY GOD, WHO WILL TRIUMPH OVER ALL ADVERSITY AND EXALT THEM. HUMILITY IS NOT SERVILITY, BUT AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF DEPENDENCE ON GOD'S GRACE. THEY CAN CAST THEIR ANXIETY ON GOD WHO CARES FOR THEM, FOR GOD'S STRENGTH AND POWER ARE ACCOMPANIED BY DIVINE COMPASSION AND CONCERN. THEIR FAITH IN THE CLAIMS OF THE GOSPEL IN A HOSTILE WORLD IS ANOTHER FORM OF RESISTANCE. AND FINALLY, THEY CAN BE CONFIDENT THAT GOD WILL *RESTORE*,

SUPPORT, STRENGTHEN, AND ESTABLISH THEM, AS THEIR SUFFERING BRINGS ETERNAL GLORIFICATION. SUCH ASSURANCE WILL GIVE THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH THE COURAGE IT NEEDS TO FULFILL ITS MISSION TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL.

THE READING FROM ACTS RECALLS THE FINAL EARTHLY APPEARANCE OF JESUS AS HE IS TAKEN UP INTO HEAVEN TO SIT AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD. AS THE PASSAGE BEGINS, THE DISCIPLES ARE GATHERED TOGETHER WITH JESUS IN JERUSALEM AFTER THE RESURRECTION. THEY KNOW THAT SOMETHING IMPORTANT IS TO HAPPEN, BUT THEY ARE STILL UNCERTAIN ABOUT WHAT IT IS TO BE. SO THEY ASK JESUS IF HE WILL NOW *RESTORE THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL*. ALTHOUGH THEY WERE HOPING FOR A DECLARATION OF THE RESTORATION OF THE DAVIDIC THRONE, JESUS SPEAKS INSTEAD OF *PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION* THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT. THIS WILL EMPOWER THEM TO BECOME HIS WITNESSES IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, SAMARIA, AND TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.

AS JESUS ASCENDS INTO HEAVEN, *TWO MEN IN WHITE ROBES* APPEAR AND ASK THE DISCIPLES WHY THEY STAND THERE GAZING UP INTO THE SKY. THEY GO ON TO PROMISE THAT JUST AS JESUS HAS SO MIRACULOUSLY LEFT THEM, HE WILL COME AGAIN IN THE SAME MANNER.

THEY RETURN TO JERUSALEM AND JOIN OTHER FOLLOWERS IN PRAYERFUL EXPECTATION FOR THE POWER OF GOD TO COME AMONG THEM.

OUR GOSPEL READING GIVES US A PORTION OF THE *HIGH PRIESTLY* PRAYER FROM THE CONCLUSION OF JESUS' FAREWELL DISCOURSE IN JOHN. THE OTHER EVANGELISTS PICTURE JESUS IN PRAYER, BUT ONLY RARELY DO THEY REVEAL THE CONTENT OF THOSE PRAYERS. ALTHOUGH THE WORDS WERE ADDRESSED TO HIS CLOSEST DISCIPLES ON THE NIGHT BEFORE HE DIED, THIS PRAYER IS ALSO OFFERED FOR HIS FOLLOWERS AND TO THE CHURCH OF EVERY PLACE AND TIME.

JESUS HAS FINISHED THE MISSION HE WAS SENT TO DO AND ASKS THAT GOD'S GLORY NOW BE REVEALED THROUGH

HIM. HE ALSO PRAYS FOR GODS' PROTECTION FOR HIS FOLLOWERS, WHO UNDERSTANDABLY WILL BE CONFUSED AND FRIGHTENED CONCERNING THE FORTHCOMING EVENTS. HOWEVER, EVEN THOUGH THEY WILL FAIL BADLY IN THE NEXT FEW HOURS WHEN THEY SEE JESUS ARRESTED AND EXECUTED, THEIR INTERNAL COMMITMENT AND OUTWARD WITNESS TO THE GOSPEL WILL SURVIVE.

AS THE PASSAGE BEGINS, JESUS LOOKS UP TO HEAVEN AND DECLARES THAT HIS *HOUR HAS COME..* THIS IS THE HOUR OF JESUS' SELF-OFFERING, AND THROUGH THAT OFFERING HE WILL COME TO GLORY. WHAT WILL APPEAR BY WORDLY STANDARDS TO BE A SHAMEFUL REPUDIATION OF JESUS' LIFE AND MESSAGE WILL BE THE MEANS OF GOD'S GLORIFICATION IN CHRIST. JESUS ASKS THE FATHER TO GLORIFY THE SON SO THAT THE SON MAY IN TURN GLORIFY THE FATHER. JESUS HAS BEEN GIVEN AUTHORITY TO GRANT ETERNAL LIFE, THROUGH WHICH THE ONE TRUE GOD AND JESUS AS GOD'S MESSIAH ARE MANIFESTED.

THE EARTHLY MINISTRY OF JESUS HAS GIVEN GLORY TO THE FATHER BY ACCOMPLISHING THE WORK HE WAS

COMMISSIONED TO PERFORM. NOW THAT THE TASKS ARE COMPLETED, IT IS FOR THE FATHER TO GLORIFY THE SON. JESUS ALREADY POSSESSED THIS GLORY WHILE WITH THE FATHER BEFORE CREATION.

MAKING GOD'S TRUE NAME AND NATURE KNOWN TO THOSE WHOM THE FATHER GAVE HIM IS THE CENTRAL WORK WITH WHICH JESUS WAS CHARGED. THOSE INDIVIDUALS BELONGED TO THE FATHER AS THE CREATOR OF ALL; BUT GOD ENTRUSTED THEM TO THE SON, WHO ENABLED THEM TO OBEY THE FATHER'S WORD.

JESUS OFFERS THIS PRAYER SPECIFICALLY FOR HIS DISCIPLES, AND NOT FOR THE WORLD THAT HAS REJECTED HIM AND HIS MISSION. JESUS HAS OVERCOME THE WORLD; BUT PROSECUTIONS WILL THREATEN TO DIVIDE HIS FOLLOWERS. THEREFORE, JESUS PRAYS THAT THEY REMAIN UNITED AND THAT THEIR UNITY REFLECT THE ONENESS OF JESUS WITH THE FATHER.

ALTHOUGH THE PRAYER GIVEN TO US GENERALLY REFERRED TO AS *THE LORD'S PRAYER*, THE HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER IN JOHN TRULY IS THE LORD'S PRAYER.

MATTHEW'S TEXT IS A MODEL OF PRAYER FOR THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS; WHEREAS ONLY JESUS COULD PRAY, *HOLY FATHER, PROTECT THEM IN YOUR NAME THAT YOU HAVE GIVEN ME, SO THAT THEY MAY BE ONE, AS WE ARE ONE*". THIS UNITY WITH GOD IS ONE OF THE DEFINING THEMES IN JOHN'S GOSPEL AS JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS DISCIPLES AND THE CHURCH TO COME.

BISHOP JOHN SHELBY SPRONG WRITES IN *THE FOURTH GOSPEL: TALES OF A JEWISH MYSTIC* THAT "GOD IS A LIFE WE ENTER, A LOVE WE SHARE, THE GROUND IN WHICH WE ARE ROOTED. THE CALL OF CHRIST IS NOT INTO RELIGION BUT INTO A NEW MYSTICAL ONENESS."

JULIAN OF NORWICH SAID "PRAYER UNITES THE SOUL WITH GOD."

I WOULD BE REMISS IF I DID NOT RECOGNISE THIS NATIONAL HOLIDAY. MOST WHO KNOW ME KNOW I AM VERY PATRIOTIC NOT JUST A FLAG WAYER, BUT FOR THE FAITH I HAVE IN MY COUNTRY.

WHEN I WAS A KID – MEMORIAL DAY WAS NOT ONLY RECOGNIZING THE CASULTIES OF WAR, BUT FOR

REMEMBERING ALL OF OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS WHO HAD PASSED AWAY. IT WAS CALLED DECORATION DAY, AND WE WENT AS A FAMILY, AFTER CHURCH, TO CLEAN AND DECORATE OUR FAMILIES GRAVESITES.

MEMORIAL DAY IS NOW JUST A HOLIDAY - AN EXTRA DAY OFF FOR FUN THINGS, BARBEQUES, A DAY ON THE LAKE – NO THOUGHT OF WHAT IT’S ALL ABOUT.

IT WAS FIRST ENACTED TO HONOR UNION SOLDIERS OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR, AND WAS EXPANDED AFTER WORLD WAR 1. ACCORDING TO SOME HISTORIANS, THE FIRST MEMORIAL DAY WAS OBSERVED IN MAY 1865, BY FORMERLY ENSLAVED BLACK PEOPLE AT THE WASHINGTON RACE COURSE IN CHARLESTON, S.C. THE RACE COURSE HAD BEEN USED AS A TEMPORARY CONFEDERATE PRISON CAMP AS WELL AS A MASS GRAVE FOR UNION SOLDIERS WHO DIED THERE. AFTER HOSTILITIES, FORMERLY ENSLAVED PEOPLE EXHUMED THE BODIES FROM THE MASS GRAVES AND REINTERRED THEM PROPERLY WITH INDIVIDUAL GRAVES. IT IS REPORTED THAT A CROWD OF UP TO TEN THOUSAND, MAINLY BLACK RESIDENTS, INCLUDING 2800 CHILDREN,

PROCEEDED TO THE LOCATION. IT INCLUDED SERMONS, SINGING AND A PICNIC ON THE GROUNDS, THEREBY CREATING THE FIRST DECORATION DAY. THE FIRST FEDERAL OBSERVANCE WAS IN WATERLOO, NY ON MAY 5, 1866 AND IN MAY 1868 DECORATION DAY WAS CREATED THROUGH A PROCLAMATION AND THE DAY WAS TO BE OBSERVED ON MAY 30TH OF EACH YEAR. THE ALTERNATIVE NAME OF MEMORIAL DAY WAS FIRST USED IN 1882, BUT DID NOT BECOME COMMON UNTIL AFTER WORLD WAR II AND BECAME OFFICIAL IN 1967. IN 1968, 100 YEARS AFTER THE 1ST MEMORIAL DAY, THIS TRADITIONAL HOLIDAY WAS MOVED TO CREATE A CONVENIENT THREE-DAY WEEKEND (THE LAST MONDAY IN MAY) AND THAT IS YOUR HISTORY LESSON.

BUT MEMORIAL DAY IS ABOUT PEOPLE, ABOUT REMEMBERING PEOPLE. PEOPLE ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THINGS! REMEMBERING PEOPLE WHO WERE IMPORTANT IN OUR LIVES. WE PRIMARILY HONOR THOSE WHO GAVE UP THEIR LIVES FOR THE FREEDOMS WE ENJOY IN THIS NATION.

FOR MANY YEARS, I HAVE VISITED ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETARY (ANOTHER MEMORIAL CREATED BY THE CIVIL WAR) AND HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THE LAYING OF A WREATH AT THE TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN. I HAD INTENDED TO ATTEND THIS YEAR, HOWEVER THIS PANDEMIC HAS GOTTEN IN THE WAY. SO I WILL VISIT OUR VETARANS CEMETARY IN BOULDER CITY, ON THE TRADITIONAL HOLIDAY. THE SILENCE AND BEAUTY OF THE PLACE IS MUCH LIKE ARLINGTON. THEN AGAIN IT HAS ITS OWN SPECIAL UNIQUENESS. JESUS LAID DOWN HIS LIFE FOR US, OUR SERVICEMEN AND WOMEN GAVE THEIR ALL FOR THEIR COUNTRY AND ITS RIGHTS -

THIS IS THE MEANING OF THE LOVE OF GOD FOR HIS PEOPLE, AND THE LOVE OF PEOPLE WHO GIVE US AN EXAMPLE OF HOW WE MUST HAVE FAITH, WISDOM, ENDURANCE, TRUST AND HOPE TO MOVE FORWARD TODAY AND ALWAYS. REMEMBER PRAYER UNITES US!

AMEN