



SAINT MARK'S

EPISCOPAL CHURCH

It happens every vacation, a little moment of panic strikes you: “it’s almost over.” It’s that moment when it is not actually the end, it’s not actually time to pack the car back up, to get back on the road. But it’s that first moment when you realize the end is a lot closer than it was at the beginning. It’s the time when you start to brace for the change that is about to come. Time to start mentally preparing yourself for what lies ahead. And it’s not only vacations, it may be semesters in college, or even just a weekend. This moment always happens whenever, you’re in the middle of something good, and that moment is about to come to a close, and there is a change ahead and what’s ahead is unknown.

Well, the Seventh Sunday of Easter is that moment for us in the Easter season. This Sunday in between the Ascension and Pentecost. It’s almost as if we were standing with the Apostles in Acts, staring, gawking, up to heaven, having just seen Jesus feet just slip out of sight up in the sky. The two men robed in white ask ““Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?” Why are we standing look up, well what else are we supposed to do? This moment between when Jesus’s body has left us and the Holy

Comforter has not yet arrived is one of those moments when we realize that things are about to be different. It is the time that we mentally prepare ourselves for what may lie ahead. Thinking about the future can bring worries and fears.

We can even see these worries and fears expressed in our collect today “Lord, please, Do not leave us comfortless, but send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us . . . “ You see we like Easter, we like it when the resurrected Christ is so easy to notice in our midst, we like when the great shepherd is with the flock, tending the flock, when the way, the truth and the life is promising us that he will go and prepare a place for us, but hasn't left yet, and of course like sitting on the beach eating fish with him on a road to Emmaus. You see, we were made for Easter, we were made to simply be in the presence of God and be in relationship with God. But in this life the paradox of the Resurrection is that while the risen Christ is present and working among us, the kingdom of God has yet to be fully revealed here and now. There is still pain, suffering, and sorrow present in our current reality. And it is up to us, the people stuck in Easter right now, to get mentally prepared to go out and do the work that we have been given to do. Namely, to go proclaim the good news to all the world, and do this not only in our words but in our actions. This includes things: like feeding the poor, healing the sick, tending to those in any need or trouble.

The Spirit descends at Pentecost and once again we are strengthened, renewed, and reminded to go out. . . . But we are not quite there yet, we know that we are about to get there, so we look ahead. We know that the road ahead will not always be easy. One of the great common denominators of this life is that we will all go through hard times, times of suffering, pain and grief. Sometimes we bring these times upon ourselves, sometimes they are brought upon us by the actions of others, sometimes it's just random chance that misfortune hits. Whatever the cause we can anticipate that at some point, to some degree, we will suffer hard times.

With this anticipation ahead of us the author of 1Peter gives us some sound advice on how to handle hard times. He gives four imperatives or commands. Humble yourselves, Discipline yourselves and keep alert, resist the adversary and remain steadfast, and cast all your anxiety on God, who cares for you. Take any moment of you life where you were struggling with some ordeal and apply these concepts to them. You can see that this advice is some pretty sound wisdom. So since we are in that moment of Easter where we have to mentally prepare ourselves for what lies ahead let's look at this advice.

- Humble yourselves under the might hand of God. I can think of no situation in which thinking I was the only person that could solve it helped. In fact that kind of pride normally

hurts rather than helps. (I believe the Greeks call it Hubris). Humbling yourself is the simple but powerful act of realizing fixing things is not ultimately up to you. God has it under control, and what a relief that is.

- Discipline yourselves and keep alert. While this one may be easier said than done, it is clear that it applies. When one is going through a time of struggle they need to pay attention, keep an eye out for what is going on, and look out for opportunities that may help them. And when those opportunities come along they need to be able to act on them and take advantage. They need to be disciplined.

- Resist the adversary and remain steadfast in your faith. If you have read any self-help book, or inspirational quote on Pinterest, you already know that perseverance is essential for going through the tough moments of our lives. Its almost a backup strategy, if humbling yourself and keeping alert and disciplined did not get you out of the tough times then just wait it out.

Now, some of you may have noticed that I changed the order, that's in the text, of these imperative verbs, that's because I think this last one is the most essential. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

Anxiety seems to be an ever increasing emotion in the world today and all that anxiety has to go somewhere; and where it goes is important. You have to give your anxiety up to God, because if you don't you will cast it on someone else. We have all been there, we are stressed and worried, and we lash out at a loved one, we are unkind, or worse, because of chronic anxiety, we become apathetic and uncaring. Anxiety can be a great paralyzer to the work of the love and the Spirit working in the world. The great irony of it all is the anxiety is produced from the exact place where we need to return it to. God's unconditional love. On some deep level, we all have a worry that the love of God cannot be that great. That he can forgive everyone but how could he possibly forgive me. We doubt the enormity and inclusiveness of God's love, and then the anxiety begins to grow. But realizing that God's love is big enough for that anxiety, realizing that unconditional really means unconditional, that no matter your past and what you have done, nor anything you could do and will do can separate you from that love of God. That however messed up you think you may be . . . it's all okay.

When that realization sinks in, then you can truly cast your anxiety on God. And without that crushing anxiety taking up all the space, love can enter in, and empower you to go out and heal the sick, tend to the needy, feed the hungry, comfort the afflicted and share the love of God that you have

found. So as we think about how this Easter season is about to come to a close, we look ahead, we need to get ready, Pentecost is almost here.