

Date Preached	15-May-2022	Date Initiated	09-May-2022
Where Preached	SAK	Appointed Readings	Easter 5, Yr C

" 'Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.' "



Three brief scenes from a recent vacation:

- A packed plane making its early-morning way to south Florida. Seated immediately behind us are two rows of loud, obnoxious male co-workers who, for the whole flight, jeer at other passengers ... brag offensively about all their past 'escapades' (let us call them) ... and basically make life miserable for every other soul on the plane  
>> I prayed God would move their hearts to kinder ways
- A Best Buy, early on a Saturday evening. We're scanning row after endless row of Apple accessories to find the one cable we need for our iPad, when suddenly some giant alarm starts going off, right in front of us. We look up to see a young man calmly walking out of the store with the iPhone he's just ripped from the display table, a clerk trailing after him, bellowing, "Give me that phone!"  
>> I silently asked Christ's blessing upon both of them
- A quiet suite, where I'm writing at the desk one morning. Out of the blue, through the lock-off to the room next door, erupts a marriage: twenty minutes of bile and invective; of "I don't care anymore!" and "you don't get to make the rules, I do!"; after a ten-minute reprieve, it starts up all over again  
>> Hands riveted over my ears and tears streaming down my cheeks, I pray the Holy Spirit to attend them—to save them from their raging grief

Now, please don't get the wrong impression: Aside from the COVID that hitched a ride home with us, our vacation was wonderful. We relaxed, got lots of sun and caught up on our sleep. These scenes did not *spoil* our vacation, but they did *punctuate* it: raw, ugly episodes that reminded us of the harsh truths of life today: the incivility; the growing social disorder<sup>1</sup>; even the burning coldness of two strangers' marriage gone awry. We were on the vacation we had dreamed about, but living our dream didn't shield us from the realities of everyday existence.

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We're in the season of Easter: the '*dream* season' of the liturgical year. Fifty days of pondering, giving thanks for and reveling in Christ's Resurrection ... His gift of Salvation and Eternal Life. At the risk of speaking too commonly, Eastertide is like an annual vacation from the concerns and worries of faith and discipleship ... a time to sit by the pool, sip a cool drink and just enjoy. In

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<sup>1</sup> I consciously mean this in two ways: both the plague of violence, substance abuse and suicide (to name but three examples) that is growing at a truly devilish (!) pace in this nation; as well as the systems and so-called 'norms' that are underlying causes of (or contributors to) these outcomes.

this [*gesture*] space, we put away the Confession, light extra candles and bask in the glory of the Risen Christ. Alleluia, amen!

And today, right in the middle of our annual Easter reverie, two saints tell us their joyful Good News dreams. First, St Peter recounts<sup>2</sup> his vision of a sheet coming down from Heaven. It contains all manner of unclean animals that Peter, an observant Jew, would never *think* of eating; but, the heavenly voice tells him, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." Christ has brought salvation to *all*, Peter understands: the Good News is to be shared freely with Jew and Gentile alike, without favor or limitation.

And then, we hear St John's<sup>3</sup> dream<sup>4</sup> of "the New Jerusalem" at the end of Revelation: of all creation being made perfect and healthy and whole; of mighty God's dwelling among mortals forever; of Christ upon the Throne.<sup>5</sup>

The juxtaposition of these two saintly dreams *is* the very 'stuff' of Easter: the grace, hope and love that Christ's Resurrection throws open to every single person willing to receive them ... *and*, in them, the final, culminating, tear-less, death-less, pain-less existence to which God has destined humanity from the very beginning.

A grand vacation. A beautiful dream. A sunny, balmy, breezy vision of Easter in which we could happily dwell, all day, every day.

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But, alas, the same ugly, pointed realities of everyday life that punctuate a week's vacation so often punctuate—if not *puncture*—the Easter bliss to which Christ has raised us. ¶The strident, incessant, self-righteous bellowings of those who are determined to impose their will ... their values ... their solutions ... on everyone else. ¶The lawlessness and disorder that plague our society ... and the unholy tangle of politics, history, economics and sociology that help cause them. ¶Relationships turned toxic ... or icy. Losses that are fresh and raw ... or old and aching. Promises broken ... vows unkept ... love curdled. Again and again, these—and other—realities burst our Easter dream. For a Resurrection people living in the brilliant, warm light of the Empty Tomb, it sure feels cold and gloomy a lot of the time.

But Jesus gives us the way to rekindle that light ... to banish that coldness ... to resurrect the Easter dream. But here's the thing: It less like a vacation and more like work—the work of faith ... of *Easter* faith. For we regain the dream of Easter not by contemplating the memory of Easters past ... or by looking forward to the joy of Easters to come ... but by rolling up our sleeves and doing the Easter work—the Good News work; the work of New Life—of Christ: loving one another, without favor or limitation. "Just as I have loved you," He tells us, "you also should love one another."

- When you're tempted to scorn or resent the loud-mouthed, hammer-fisted ways this world is so prone to, He tells us, ↓ don't. Rather, *love* those who shout and swagger

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<sup>2</sup> Peter actually *has* the dream in the preceding chapter of Acts.

<sup>3</sup> Scholars differ as to whether John the Apostle and Evangelist is also the John of Patmos to whom is revealed the apocalypse of Revelation. The Episcopal Church's *sanctorale* (book of saints) takes the position that they are one and the same person. See *Lesser Feast and Fasts (2018)*, entry for 27 December (Feast of St John).

<sup>4</sup> I'm taking some license here. This isn't so much John's 'dream' as part of the long, complex revelation God's angel makes to John, which he then records as the book we now know as Revelation.

<sup>5</sup> Christians have argued for two thousand years about how to interpret not just this specific dream but, indeed, *all* of the Revelation to St John. But whatever interpretive lens we apply, it's clear from today's text that for everyone who believes, the ultimate end of existence is eternal oneness with the Divine.

and slash ... and pray they may be transformed. For in praying for *their* transformation, *you* will be transformed, as well.

- Resist the urge to condemn—or overlook—the crime and the injustice of this world, He tells us. Rather, *love* all who victimize others, in any way ... and pray they may be raised to new and greater life, in Me. For in praying for *them* to be raised, *you* will be raised, as well.
- Do not harshly judge or helplessly mourn the selfish cruelty and ugly pettiness of this world, He tells us. Rather, *love* those whose lives are riddled with painful, empty places and pray they'll let Me fill them. For in praying for *them* to be filled, *you* will be filled, as well.

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It would, I suppose, be nice if Christian faith were a perpetual dream: a lifelong vacation spent on a gently swaying hammock strung between the tree of SALVATION, on one end, and the tree of PARADISE, on the other. In truth, however, the very *un*-dreaminess of this world and all its harsh, grinding realities punctuates, and punctures, the Easter dream, again and again.

But on those stormy days, when the surf is rough and the sand is blowing and the sun just barely shines, Jesus tells us to *love one another*, in prayer. For in that love—*our* love—He will 'Easter' this world again and again; until the dream of the Empty Tomb is this world's only reality.



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