

Genesis 1:1-2:4a
Isaiah 55:1-11
Ezekiel 37:1-14
Isaiah 61:1-4, 9-11
Romans 6:3-11

Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21
Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21; 94b-6
Zephaniah 3:14-20
Daniel 3:1-29
John 20:1-18

Sermon Saturday April 20th, 2019 Easter Vigil

God Renews Us!

Yesterday, we gathered to reflect on Jesus' suffering and death. Tonight, we hear stories where the Israelites and early believers face adversity and suffering as they try to live out their faith.

We hear these stories, and start thinking about the adversity and suffering we face in our own lives. We reflect on the grief we experience when those we love take their last breath. We reflect on the pain we experience when we deal with an illness, or an injury, or a mental health problem. We reflect on the hurt we experience when our relationships fail or are wounded. We reflect on the anxiety and fear we experience when living through a recession. Like the Israelites, like the disciples, we often feel confused, sad, angry when adversity and suffering come our way. We long to heal. We long to be renewed.

We gathered yesterday and today to hear and reflect on stories where we have faced adversity. But, we also gather to hear the good news, the hope that is imbedded within these stories. The good news that tells us that God will heal and renew us from our suffering.

On Good Friday we shed tears over the suffering and inhumane death Jesus faced. Yet, we also give thanks, because on the cross we experience God's forgiving and redemptive love. We believe that in his death Jesus has taken away the power of death. Death will no longer separate us from God. Our brokenness will no longer separate us from God.

We feel compassion for the Israelites who suffer oppression from the Egyptians. But, we also give thanks, because through Moses and Aaron, God separates the seas and liberates the Israelites from slavery. Healing them. Giving them new life.

We feel empathy for the Israelites as they face persecution during the Babylonian exile for staying faithful to God. We all have experienced persecution from time to time when sharing our faith with others. Yet, we also give thanks, because God lifted Daniel from the fire. God breathed new life into the dry bones of Israel. God called the Persians to come and liberate the Israelites from Babylonian exile.

We stand with our Christian sisters and brothers as they face persecution in Rome. We hear their frustrations, and yet, we also give thanks, because the Holy Spirit helps

them heal and endure. The mission gives them purpose and hope that this world can change.

In all these stories, we hear the suffering of God's people. In all these stories, we hear God's promise that God will heal and renew us. In all these stories we see God's promise being fulfilled as God comes to them in the midst of their confusion, anger, frustration, and woundedness, opening their eyes to see that God is indeed present, and is acting to heal and renew them.

For Mary, we see that her grief is overwhelming. Her suffering has blinded her from remembering God's promise. The angel appears telling her the good news that Jesus is alive, and yet, she still struggles to see this good news. Then Jesus appears before her, and yet she still isn't able to see God's promise being fulfilled. Instead, she mistakes him for the gardener.

For the Israelites, their pain and suffering is overwhelming in Egypt and later Babylon. They struggle to cling to the promise that God will take care of them. That God will make everything right. Their pain deafens them from hearing the prophets hopeful message.

Whenever we experience pain and suffering we struggle to see God. We struggle to remember the promise that we will experience healing and renewal from our suffering. Like Mary, we struggle to see the good news, God's healing and redemptive love, even as it is touching our lives.

For Mary, her grief is relieved when Jesus calls out her name. Suddenly, Jesus is no longer dead but living. Suddenly, Mary remembers all that Jesus promised. Now she feels empowered to go back to the others and tell them what she has seen.

The Easter story is a story where God's healing and redemptive activity is happening right in front of us, and yet, we can't quite imagine standing in front of the living Christ when we come to mourn Jesus' death.

Fortunately, like Jesus calling out Mary's name, God finds a way to get our attention. God opens our eyes to see God's healing and renewing love happening in our lives. We then remember the promise, which moves us to reveal God's healing and renewing love to others.

And as our eyes are opened to God's loving action, we see that God actually makes us new. Things don't go back to the way they were before. In all the suffering I have faced in my life not once have I come away as the same person I was before. God healed my wounds and made me new.

When Jesus first creates his social network, he reaches out to Peter. Now in his resurrection he reaches out to Mary. The Easter story is a story of a new world that is different from the old. It comes with a remaking of us in a way that deeply reflects God's kingdom.

We are the church. Revealers of God's kingdom come. In Jesus' encounter with Mary he is starting a new age. Jesus is wanting us to reflect God's healing and redeeming love to the world. Jesus is wanting us to reveal this new age. This renewed creation where everything we knew is remade. All that is left untouched is the promise. The promise that God calls us to remember. Giving us hope when we face suffering. Empowering us to go and love others in the same way our savior loves us.

Let us pray, loving God, we give thanks that when we are unable to see you that you make yourself known to us. Helping us see your healing and renewing love touching our lives in the midst of our suffering. Empower us to love others in this same way.

Amen.