

Easter Three (2020)

(1 Peter 2:11-17, St. John 16:16-22)

“For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

You will have no doubt noticed that the Prayer Book lessons appointed for these first three Sunday's after Easter do not allow us to bask in the glow of Christ's resurrection.

This is most noticeable in the portions appointed for the Epistles.

On the first Sunday, the Lesson from 1 John begins *“Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world...”* Last week's Lesson from 1 Peter 2 begins *“This is thankworthy, if a man for conscience sake toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.”* And today's (also from 1 Peter 2) begins *“...I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”*

Rather than allow us to bask, the appointed Lessons call us to action!

We are fight against our flesh. We are to endure grief. We are to overcome.

We might say these lessons are telling us: “Christ is risen! Go now and live out this truth.”

Or, as St. Paul states it in Romans 13:12 *“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.”*

In doing this, the Prayer Book is being faithful to Jesus' instructions.

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to the Apostles and up to 500 others over a period of 40 days before He ascended into heaven.

Before He ascended He told them (St. Luke 24:49) *“...tarry ye...until ye be endued with power from on high.”*

Jesus told the Apostles they could only bask in the glory of His bodily resurrection and ascension for a short period.

Once they were endued with power from the promised Holy Ghost (ten days after the Ascension), they were to get busy and be His witnesses in all of the world.

This commission is what the Prayer Book lessons are exhorting us to, and maybe more so this year because we have sheltered in place, “tarried” for several weeks now ...

You and I know the truth of Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

In Holy Baptism we were empowered by the Holy Ghost through water.

Therefore we are now, today, to go and be His witnesses in this portion of the world He has placed us in.

Ephesians 5:15, 16 has great meaning for us today. It states *“See then that ye walk circumspectly (Gk. accurately, diligently), not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”*

The days have passed when we could rely on the moral fabric of society to support the practice of orthodox, evangelical religion.

Heck, today we can't rely on society to determine whether a child is a boy or a girl, or whether a baby should live or die!

Today, often good is called evil and evil is called good.

Because this is so, we must urgently heed St. Paul's exhortation in Philippians 2:15 and be *“... blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;”*

These Prayer Book lessons are then in a sense prophetic.

While every generation of the Church that has used them at mass should heed them, this generation, our generation, must particularly do so!

If we, as Biblical, Traditional, Sacramental, Commissional Anglo-Catholic Christians do not, then who will?

If we hear the sense of urgency these Lessons present to us and we do not heed them, who will?

I know the concern. We are small with few resources and little influence.

Well, under Gideon's leadership God conquered an army of Midianites with 300 faithful Israelites holding clay pots. He turned the whole of the Roman Empire upside down beginning with 12 Apostles.

I don't think God expects us to conquer the world for the Gospel.

Not the APA or the whole Continuum, never mind our parish.

But what He does expect is for us to conquer ourselves.

He expects us to (2 Corinthians 10:5) *“...bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;”*

He does not expect us to go to every creature in the world.

But He does expect us to go to every creature within our sphere of influence; our children and grandchildren, extended family and friends, our neighbors and social network, the clerk at the market, the teller at the bank.

He expects us to bring the Gospel to them.

I hear this objection too...”But I’m not good at telling others about Jesus.”

My brethren, that misses the mark. The Gospel isn’t a mere message, it’s a Person. The Gospel is the crucified, resurrected and ascended Jesus Christ.

Bringing the Gospel to others is bringing the living presence of Jesus Christ in us (Who dwells in us) to others.

It is... “Where I go, the presence of Jesus Christ goes.”

So, when I’m in the supermarket checkout line, the Gospel, the Presence of Christ *in me*, is there. Same when we’re with our family, friends, coworkers and the next person we encounter.

This doesn’t take any special ability. But it does take a full, personal surrender to Jesus Christ and a willingness to be His witness.

It takes an ever-growing commitment to daily prayer, consistent study of Scripture, and at least weekly reception of the Eucharist, by which we receive immeasurable grace.

It takes changing our affections and actions. Our words and our deeds.

But we can do these. God has given us the grace.

It’s really a matter of our willingness.

There is an unfortunate tendency in Eastertide to relax ourselves spiritually.

The intensity of Lent with its disciplines has passed and we can often kick back and put our lives on spiritual cruise control all the way until Advent.

The Lessons of these first three weeks after Easter say “No way!”

They say, by the resurrection power of Jesus Christ which dwells in us: “overcome the world” (week one), “endure grief and suffer wrong” (week two) and “abstain from fleshly lusts” (today, week three).

Jesus does not allow us to kick back. No cruising allowed.

Not, that is, if we want to be found faithful witnesses...

May we use the grace we are being given to hear and heed what these Prayer Book lessons exhort us to.

In the Name of the Father...Amen.