

John 20:24-29 / 1. Peter 1:3-9

When the late great theologian Karl Barth was a parish pastor in the small mountain village of Safenwil, population 3,279, he preached a series of thirteen consecutive sermons about the war in 1914. One Sunday morning, an elderly woman from the congregation approached him after the service and said to him: “Herr Pfarrer, Pastor, week after week you have now been preaching about the war. Don’t you think it’s time to talk about something else?” So, listening to the words of this elderly woman that echo in my ears long after they were spoken, my sermon today is not going to be a Covid-19 sermon. Rather, it’s going to be PC, a post-Covid-19 sermon.

One week after we celebrated Easter—and celebrate Easter we did, albeit in a rather unusual and different way than perhaps ever before and ever again—we receive a bulk letter from the apostle Peter, yes *the* apostle Peter, who was concerned about many fledgling Christian communities. It was not directed at one particular church but it’s like a Tweet he hoped would be re-tweeted from church to church.

“My fellow Christians. When Jesus was raised from the dead, we all received a new lease on life. And just like Christ is alive today, our hope is, too. Christ’s resurrection, and ours with him, is our inheritance. Nobody can take that away from us. Ever. The power of God makes this a reality for us. We don’t have to wait for it, but we have it and can participate in it right here, right now.”

This was a living-hope message for these small communities because of the many trials they had to suffer. And it is an important message for us in our own time of trial. The apostle Peter apparently considered such sufferings a test of genuine faith. In that, he and the apostle Paul agreed. Yet, suffering for Peter was not a test devised by a capricious God who just wanted to see if people would renounce God when the chips were down. Just ask Job. On the contrary, Peter thought about such testing along the lines of the prophets and the Psalmists who would complain to God, even be angry with God in their trials, yet ended up praising God and giving glory and honor to God's name.

“Your faith is worth more than your worldly possessions,” Peter told the people. “You cannot eat your gold and your money. Their worth comes and goes. It's fleeting. What is most important and everlasting is your relationship to God and to each other, revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.”

Now, Peter was not naive. He knew that it takes money to get things done and to keep things moving. But he reminds these early faith communities, as he reminds us today, that money is not enough to build a solid foundation in this new post-Easter world. His entire letter is devoted to a different way of life together. In it, Peter lays down the guidelines for living in God's household, *oikos nomos*, from which we derive our word *economy*. This is critical for any Christian community because at stake is, as Peter put it, “the salvation of our souls.” Not our individual souls, mind you. That salvation is a done deal. But our communal soul is at stake as we need to find a way to live within this new and unchanging reality.

There is no reset, no going back to the life people lived before Jesus's resurrection. Not then, and not now. As Maggie will sing here in a moment in the words of Georg Friedrich Handel, "I know that my Redeemer Liveth, and in my flesh shall I see God." We cannot un-know that. Whether we believe it or not that Jesus was raised from the dead does not matter. It is a reality. What matters is whether we recognize this reality or not.

So what might life in the reality of Christ's resurrection look like in this year's post-Easter world (you noticed, I did not say post-Covid 19)? How might we envision God's economy? Peter has a whole catalog of things for God's people to take into account. These are some of the recurring highlights of his letter. What matters in God's new economy are, in no particular order:

Self-discipline, not self-indulgence. Humility. No malice, guile, insincerity, or slander. Building up the church and society in an equitable way. Loving our families but honoring everyone. Don't abuse anybody. Don't worry about how we look and what to wear, but worry about our heart and soul. Don't repay evil for evil but with a blessing. Don't indulge in excess. Be hospitable to everyone, especially the poor and disenfranchised. Taking good care of our own faith community. ... Note that there is no mention of money here at all.

Peter's laundry list of early Christian ethics would be a good starting point for any and all of our politicians as they try to figure out a way of life in the new reality of post-Covid-19. (I say post, because it will come.) Those who govern us need our sincere prayers and support. But, as Peter also points out, those who govern us need us to hold them accountable if and when they stray from the path he has outlined for us, who live in the reality of the risen and living Christ. It is not the economy nor is it the stock market that are at stake. At stake is the salvation of our communal souls. For that, we alone are responsible—before one another and before God.

As I was thinking about all of this and as I am imagining what life in the reality of the risen Christ might look like for us here and now at Ladue Chapel, for our nation and the world, and for my own life, I remembered a hymn written by the German pastor Martin Rinkart. He was the pastor of the church of Eilenburg, a small town about 15 miles Northeast of the city of Leipzig during the 30 Years War. While he served there in 1637, the plague broke out and ravaged the town, the rest of the country and Europe. All the clergy in Eilenburg and its neighboring towns succumbed to the disease and Rinkart was left with the grim task of conducting funerals. In 1637 he buried up to fifty people a day ... a day, including his wife. And by the end of the year he had officiated at 4,480 funerals.

I cannot even begin to imagine how this pastor managed to do what he had to do and I marvel at his faithful resolve. But I marvel even more about the hymn he wrote in the

midst of what must have seemed like the end of all things. You know this hymn. I am sure it is one of your favorites, as it is one of mine:

“Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices / Who wondrous things has done / in whom this world rejoices. / Who from our mothers’s arms / has blessed us on our way, / with countless gifts of love, / and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God, / through all our life be near us. / With ever joyful hearts, and blessed peace to cheer us. / And keep us in his grace / and guide us when perplexed / and free us from all ills / in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God / who reigns in highest heaven / To Father and to Son and Spirit now be given / The one eternal God / Whom heaven and earth adore / The God who was and is / and shall be evermore.”

May it be so. Now, and always. Amen.

Rev. Dieter U. Heinzl, PhD
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