

WELCOME 10th May 2020 – 5 Easter '20 A

Luke 24:1-9 & 1 Peter 2:13-25

Good morning! Welcome back to the On-line well of Living Water as our Easter season celebration continues! It's great we can be together in this way...in this time when we can't be together. I'm glad you're here & pray this becomes a place you feel ok & a part of all that's going on. Please do continue to check our website for our weekly Zoom Bible Study catch-ups. Those are a nice way to stay in touch & experience God's Word together! And Hey! Happy Mother's Day!

As we move into this week... There's an old saying; "Credibility is the currency of trust." If that is true, then many leaders, governments & organizations are flat broke! Whether it's the World Health Organization that criticized travel bans & gave out misleading information about human-to-human Wuhan virus transmission or the conjecture surrounding the virus' origins. Whether it's State or Federal leaders saying one thing only to have a minister in their cabinet say something different a few hours later. Or experts encouraging social distancing at schools while giving Rugby players permission to grapple & wrestle & sweat & whatever all over each other...

With the mixed messaging, is it any wonder we're confused & don't know who or what to trust? Is it any wonder people are asking what is credible & what is not? This credibility deficit has been years in the making. Our leaders have squandered trust over decades. Banks & business are still under a cloud for their excesses, abuses, & identified illegal behaviour, & the Church has rightly come under close scrutiny. It's an issue of credibility & it's the same issue Peter addresses.

As those who call ourselves followers of Jesus...How would anyone know if we were telling the truth?

As people born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus...Why would anyone take us seriously?

In a world that makes all manner of claims about life & death & purpose & meaning...Why should someone believe us?

Peter offers true wisdom here:

*"For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you.
He is your example, and you must follow in his steps."*

In a world that is harsh at the best of times, among folks who will often turn their worst against your best, we are at our most believable, our most credible, when our lives look like Jesus...when our words sound like Jesus...when we move together in love for others & do good for others like Jesus did...at whatever cost bearing whatever pain.

There is no greater challenge & no higher joy than to share in genuine ways what we have first received from Jesus: love that never fails, life that never ends, hope that never fades, & joy that never diminishes & we'll experience/explore that together today...as we **MOVE TOGETHER IN LOVE**.

Let's pray...and then we'll get stuck into it.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord, we come as we are, to become what you meant us to be. We come as we are, locked in, afraid at times, broken at all times, full of disappointments...We ask you to make us whole. Set us free. We come as we are with our plans and our dreams, our joys and our sorrows to be touched by your grace and transformed by your love, so that your plans and your dreams for us may be realized. We come as we are trusting that you will make us what you desire. Thank you for mercy that reaches out, for patience that waits for our return, and for love that is always ready to welcome us and bring us home to the Father...Jesus in your Name we pray...Amen

FAITH CHAT:

- 1st thing you'd like to do when the Covid-19/Wuhan flu shutdown is over...When you are free to move about the cabin?
- How do you respond to authorities in your life, even if they appear incompetent, or harsh?
- What in your experience is a good way to express God's love to someone else?

5 EASTER '20 A – MOVE TOGETHER: IN LOVE

I was listening to the news about the changes being made to the Olympics in Tokyo & the logistics & impacts of moving them from July 2020 to July 2021 & it hit me that it was 20 years ago this coming September, heartbreak struck the Sydney Olympics as the Australian Women's 4x100 metre relay team...strong medal contender...did not finish their early heat & did not advance. The 2nd runner Lauren Hewitt, started her run too early & outran her baton-carrying teammate Elly Hutton. They ran beyond the allotted handoff zone & in the mix-up dropped the baton. It happens. One runner doesn't fully connect w/ the next...baton falls to the ground...the race is lost. I learned the French word for "baton" is *les temoins*. French speakers know I just used a word that is not only translated "baton" but also "witness." To drop the baton is to drop what is supposed to be handed off to someone else. To drop the baton is to drop the witness. **BIBLES**

As we've been reading through the 1st letter of Peter here toward the end of the NT...Peter's driving concern is for the passing of the baton/witness...to Jesus Christ...& it must not be dropped. Peter knows those who read his letters in the 1st century as sure as we who read them in the 21st are outsiders in the world. He repeats the words "aliens, foreigners, temporary residents" to describe us...our worldview, attitudes, beliefs, values, hopes & aspirations will not line up w/ those who do not know/have not yet experienced love & life & the *living hope* found in the crucified & risen Jesus Christ. In a world that is harsh at the best of times, among folks who will often turn their worst against your best, Peter writes to ensure we pass the baton/witness faithfully/fervently/fully to those around us...against all odds & in the face of any cost.

You see as he writes, Peter has a fire burning in his heart lit by Jesus in his final hours of life...Peter remembers: *I will be with you only a little longer...So I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.*" – *Jn 13:33-35* Peter remembers Jesus engraving on the hearts of the 12 that the lasting legacy...the only credible witness we have for the world is love. Peter knows only the love of the Father poured out through Jesus crucified risen & living now through his people will transform the world...has driven out sin/death/evil & will ultimately wipe every tear from every eye - eliminate death sorrow crying & pain forever & make all things new. Peter knows the whole world will be drawn into the living hope of the living Jesus not by our sermons or our sacraments...our festivals or our buildings...our clever on-line adaptations our legislative triumphs or our cool Christian jewelry publishing houses concerts or workshops...but by love.

Jesus goes to the cross to show in word & deed that GOD IS LOVE. & all of us *world over* are made in the image of that love, are made to experience that love w/o end & are loved beyond what we would ever hope for or imagine to be re-created as wearers & bearers of that love to the world. Peter knows the redeeming power of love. Peter knows the transforming might of love. Peter knows firsthand...it happened in his life...It was on **that** night that Peter 3X denied he knew Jesus...cursed himself to answer the accusation of being a disciple...but it was **that** crucified & risen Jesus who reclaimed Peter in love, called forth love in return & entrusted Peter w/ the baton...to take that love & the triumphant news of Jesus' resurrection from the dead to the ends of the earth living in the presence of Jesus alive w/in him.

7X in this short letter, Peter points to the love these Christ followers can demonstrate to the world as **THE SIGN** of their authenticity...the genuineness of the life of Christ at work in them...Peter knows love must reveal itself in a real way or it will forever be doubted...So he writes: *(Dearly beloved) I warn you as "temporary residents & foreigners" to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbours. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honourable behaviour, & give honour to God when he judges the world. Just to note...Dearly beloved...literally "you who have been loved unconditionally" (agapetoi) Peter says; always remember; our very existence was ruined to death until God in Jesus Christ died to remake us in his image...until God in Jesus Christ gives us for his sake alone the inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled & unfading. God, who owes us nothing, has given us everything needed for our life w/ him now & forever. Forgiveness, reconciliation w/ the Father, an end to the power of sin & death in us in Jesus crucified/risen...That's the starting point for a life in Christ's footsteps... **Then...***

*Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbours...That word (anastrophe) "live decently/honourably/good lives - properly" is critical to Peter. It is used more times in this short letter than in any NT book (1:15, 18; 2:12; 3:1, 2, 16). It implies a distinctive way of living in the way/manner of Jesus...AND it involves repeating that manner/way of living again & again It's simple...the world needs to see love...often...daily...over/over again...repeatedly...or it will never believe. Peter says those who have been born again into the *living hope* of Jesus' death/rez are on a clear path toward a certain destination. We live w/ a future certainty grounded in the present reality of Jesus' victory over sin/death/evil...so we live now w/ that future in mind...Living toward others what we have received...grace, mercy, love, peace, joy, assurance, hope...*

We've noted before that because these follower of Jesus didn't take part in the non-Xn behaviours of their neighbours feasts/sacrifices/velvety/temple worship they were accused of wrongdoing & conduct detrimental to the well-being of the

Empire & the favour of the gods. Their fellow Romans were afraid the gods would get angry because of the Xns. BUT Roman historian Tacitus took note of their way of life: “Despite their guilt as Christians & the ruthless punishment it deserved, the victims were to be pitied. For it was felt they were being sacrificed to one man’s brutality rather than to the national interest.” Even a Roman of status could see there was something unique in followers of Jesus that was better than & missing in the Emperor... Nero was a horrible human being & the contrast b/t HIM & those he ruthlessly & gleefully slaughtered to slake his bloodlust was striking. Peter then says...

For the Lord's sake, submit to all human authority...It is God's will that your honourable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you. For you are free, yet you are God's slaves, so don't use your freedom as an excuse to do evil...For God is pleased when, conscious of his will, you patiently endure unjust treatment. Is Peter asking believers to be doormats for evil rulers? **No**. At least 2X the NT records Peter/apostles saying, “We must obey God not human authority.” (Acts 4:19/5:28 Scripture never says it's right to do what God has forbidden, but in obeying God know there are repercussions. *For the Lord's sake... It is God's will...you are God's slaves...God is pleased when, conscious of his will...* Our lives, Peter says, are driven not by **WHAT WE GET** (we might get nothing but heartache & a hiding) but by **WHO WE SERVE**. Peter drives home the difficult reality that we as people who have been bought & paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ are to live in such a way that by our lives we stop the mouths of those who would criticize our faith...At the very least give them no ammunition. We are called to a life that is above...above criticism/reproach/shame. The greatest evidence of the transforming power of the gospel is your life. There is really no greater way for people to see the transforming power of Jesus Christ than to see the life of a person transformed by Jesus Christ. It's the foundation of all of our witness. Not that we are going to own the moral high ground but that we live toward a higher calling. As sinner/saints we will never be exemplars of moral “superiority” but as imitators of Christ we *CAN BE* examples of living toward Christlikeness revealing Christ to the world one day one word one loving action at a time.

We who have been embraced by the love of God in the crucified & risen Jesus now have the capacity & responsibility to be forerunners, first visible residents, of this new creation God will one day bring to completion. The new heaven & the new earth where “tears... death...sorrow...crying... pain” are eliminated from the landscape are gifts of God by the hand of the One who defeated death itself...But the new heaven & new earth are also a gift Jesus gives to the world through us. Through our deeds & words of love, compassion...our generosity...the joy we bring to any circumstance... the hope we manifest in the face of life's painful days...our active seeking for opportunities to serve & do good & make this world less “tearful, painful, sorrowful & deathlike.” God promises to make a home in those who make themselves vulnerable in love – who open the corners of this world to God's love by their own love. As followers of Jesus Christ, we're called to take the baton of love from Christ & pass it to others.

A while back I encountered James Ellis III – University Chaplain in MI...he writes: Increasingly these days, I see Christians embracing a paper-thin form of love. This love promotes comfort, & warm, fuzzy feelings of peace on earth, but has little-to-no understanding that God both loves us & has otherworldly expectations for how we conduct ourselves...Ellis compares what passes for love in our world...paper-thin/niceness/you do your thing I'll do mine sort of tolerance over against a love that looks like Jesus Love that flourishes in the light of the rez...Love that silences criticism by its compassion & sacrificial service on behalf of the neighbour...Love that uses freedom for the greatest good for the greatest number of people... Love that forgives, that restores relationships, that blesses instead of curses...that looks for the good & strives to multiply it at any cost...for the sake of God's glory & the widening embrace of his kingdom. Usually at *GREAT COST!*

He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin & live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed. Once you were like sheep who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls.

In the sheepfold of that Shepherd, each one of us becomes radiant w/ his love...drawing those around us into His light. There is no greater challenge & no higher joy than to share in genuine ways what we have first received from Jesus: love that never fails, life that never ends, hope that never fades, & joy that never diminishes...

Let's pray with that in mind...

Lord Jesus, you are the resurrection & the life, the promise of new life in you is a breath of fresh air in a dry dying land. You make all things new. Let that be us...by your Spirit plant your Word not just in our minds, but also in the deeper yearnings of our heart and soul. Make us radiant in your new creation to shed light on everyone we meet. Build into our lives the unlimited capacity to imitate you in all we are & do, & grant us the wisdom & boldness to share your love with those all around us. In your name we pray... Amen