

# ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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## THE MIRACLE WE NEED RIGHT NOW

**The Rev. Andrew F. Kline**

Text of the Sermon preached the Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 17, 2020

ACTS 17:22-31 | PSALM 66:7-18

1 PETER 3:13-22 | JOHN 14:15-21

As we enter the third month of our quarantine we see some fraying at the edges. Look outside and there is restlessness, boredom, protest – even rebellion. Look into the mirror, and well, what do we see? What do we really want to see?

God's Word in our psalm of praise, Psalm 66, cuts to the heart:

“For you, O God, have proved us;

You have tried us just as silver is tried.

You brought us into the snare, \*

you laid heavy burdens upon our backs.

You let enemies ride over our heads;

We went through fire and water: \*

But you brought us out into a place of refreshment.”

BUT.... That seems like a big “but” right now. When and how Lord? We are seeing impatience win over careful reason. Partisanship cloud our thinking when we need to agree on the facts. As we continue to pray for the first responders, we realize that more and more every one feels like a first responder. Somewhere in us, we have reached a limit, yet need to find new strength. The Lord is testing us indeed!

Our bishop has said recently that the best solution at hand to change the church, to address the need all around us, is to first seek self transformation, to resolve to change ourselves. As the old wisdom goes, when the plane is going down, put your oxygen mask on first, and then go look to help another.

I agree completely. The only problem is, to quote St. Isaac the Syrian from the fourth century: Self knowledge is a greater miracle than resurrection from the dead.

I’ve been meditating on that a lot. The facts is, we rarely change our minds about the big things in life. The title of a remarkable book that summarizes decades of research says it all: “Mistakes were made – (Just not by me....). Hundreds of studies into the realities of confirmation bias, tribal identity, polarization and influence all show one thing. As Robert Heinlein said a generation ago: “Man is not a rational animal; he is a rationalizing animal.”

Left to our own devices we would rather not think a thing through. It is safer to try and control our environment and keep the beliefs we think have worked for us in the past. That’s why we humans are the master idol makers. We worship what we think controls our destiny. We worship them to try to control them as well.

St. Paul’s sermon in Athens is famous for being an example of how to reach people right where they are. After all, Paul has just come from Thessalonica where they have thrown him out of the city for teaching that Jesus is a greater Lord than Caesar. In Athens, he strategically decides not to get political.

Rather, he notes that we all acknowledge an unknown God, a God beyond our little idols, our pursuits of wealth and happiness, the God that must be responsible for all we see, the God who created us, “in whom we live and move and have our being.”

And right there, when he has found this profound common ground, he inserts the catalyst of the Christian story. The reason we must put away our idols and honor this God is because the Creator God has raised Jesus from the dead to be our Judge.

Yes. Jesus is alive. Such great news. But even more interesting, is that this vindication of life implicates us all to take responsibility for it, to step up to our own role on this earth. We must change because the resurrection demands it. We will put away our idols because they are no longer the strength and measure of our lives.

The resurrection demands that we change. It demands we take responsibility, not only for our sin, but for the result of being forgiven, the gift of being able to live now not for ourselves, but for others. To believe the resurrection is to see that God is at work in every inspiration of his breath. He is at work smashing idols yes. But he is at work in great minds looking for cures to a pandemic that has stopped the world in its tracks.

We are wasting our breath to try explain Christian faith without reference to the resurrection. And Paul knew it, especially in the company of the great philosophers of Athens.

Imagine what Paul would say to us this morning. Would he berate us for our idols? Would he tell us to have more patience in suffering? Or would he mention that God raised our Judge from the dead so that we ought to get about the business of loving one another! And don't forget to use all the tools, the gifts, given us.

Jesus said: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth.... I will not leave you orphaned. I am coming to you."

Indeed, because Jesus lives, because "he is coming to us", we should love one another. If we can love one another, it will be proof that we are keeping every last word he spoke to us. But we need that very first gift he gave us on the day of his resurrection, the breath of the Holy Spirit, within and without us.

Every day we should be learning that the Holy Spirit is unfathomable and infinite in operation. In addition to the breath of new creation and forgiveness that is ours on day of the Resurrection, the Holy Spirit will work in at least three more ways: as Defender in persecution, comforter in affliction, and guide when we need the truth.

For today, consider most of all, that Spirit is working to reveal Jesus to us, to awaken us to the responsibility we have to one another and to the world.

We are being tested. And we know how hard this is. The living Lord demands our honesty. We must not waste his breath in us.

Come Holy Spirit! Give us every grace that comes with your presence. Give us the miracle that sometimes seems more wonderful than the miracle of the resurrection. Give us the fruit of self knowledge! Spirit of the living God: Lead us into all Truth!