

Sermon for 1 May 2022/Baltimore, Md. 21214  
Third Sunday of Easter/Native American Ministries Sunday  
Scriptures: Acts 9:1-20; Psalm 30 (UM 762); Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

***“The real thing”***

I want to be calm ... but I also want to be transparent, like we said last Sunday that the church urged us to be throughout these Great Fifty Days following Easter.

I mean, do we realize what is happening? Our dear old Bethesda Baltimore is changing. The place, the family, the whole entity we so gratefully hold onto is slipping out of our control.

Look@ the first scripture assigned for today: The guy we most hated, who’s been out to get us in every part of his being, has been struck blind and been led to Damascus. And now Ananias, a disciple, sees the Lord in a vision, and hears the order to receive Saul and lay hands on him, that he may receive his sight. We’ve grown up on the story: We’ve always known him as Paul, “and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’”

This is church, talking about itself.

Then read today’s psalm, Psalm 30: “O Lord my God, I cried to you for help...What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? You have turned my mourning into dancing...O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever.”

This is not things as usual. This is bumps and breaks and requests and renewal, in dizzying progression...

Then John 21: “After these things...” after Easter evening, and the upper room, and the locked doors, and Thomas’ doubting ... and then a week later, “put your hand in my side.” “Blessed are they who have not seen and yet they believe...” and then today’s lesson, “Peter, do you love me?” and the beloved disciple saying, “It is the Lord.”

We are not a holding operation. We are an outreach. Listen to our time of joys and concerns each Sunday. We’re either yearning and begging for rescue, or bringing good news of rescue and renewed hope.

That’s our essence. We wouldn’t be in this building if there hadn’t come a time in the outward growth of Baltimore City when a few Methodist Protestants could gather and very quickly become a large fellowship ... and here we are, the sequel in much changed times ... but not just hanging on,

but portraying, proclaiming, all these things that give us life and hope and stability and regular chores and ... well, we're not just a holding operation, I do not believe or see in all the structures and scriptures and songs and ministries that make up this part of the action of God in Jesus Christ.

I will not minister otherwise. I am not serving here merely to administer the sacraments until we die out. That is neither your job nor mine. This is the temptation of our time, and we know it. This is the real thing. All these stories and songs are neither the end or even the literal start of the story that keeps us alive and together. Scripture is the light and the outline, but by no means is there now, or was there then, or will there foreseeably be a time when a full description of reality can be made. We are onto power ... and not power over others, but power over our own selves and all the temptations and weaknesses and separations that often make it seem like they are the full story when they're not.

Mysterious as it is, the news is GOOD. The whole pattern is trustworthy. All the worry and all the doubt and all the turns and twists of what we call fate are nothing compared to the thrill of walking with this spirit among these brothers and sisters here and now. That passage from Revelation tries to spell it out ... but who knows what the top will be? Not science. Not history. Not anything but this present beginning, which is all we have and all we need.

That means being as open and contemporary and at the same time as traditional and consistent as we possibly can be. It means opening our doors as far as we can, to as many as we can. It means ...well, that's what these Great Fifty Days of Easter are training and pointing us to accept and explore. Do as much as you can, as long as you can, for as many as you can... John Wesley said something like that, and it is in our character as a denomination to seek out and to open doors .. We are one of the ways the world hopes to get better...

Help us to grasp this and build on it, this day and always, through Jesus Christ, Amen.