

Sermon for 8 May 2022 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore  
Fourth Sunday of Easter/Festival of the Christian Home/Mother's Day  
Scriptures: Acts 9:36-43; Psalter: 137 (*Response 1*) Psalm 23 (King James version); Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30  
**"Madonna"**

Last Sunday we said the big thing about the Great Fifty Days following Easter is how we grow in believing what Easter was true. This season is designed to prepare ourselves so we can see resurrection and new life as it happens all around us, all the time.

Remember? I said little old Bethesda Baltimore is changing.

And sure enough, it is. Specifically, several of us got e-mails a couple of days ago from Meg McFadden saying the permit for the fence around the parking lot was approved and the fence will be installed sometime soon over a period of something like two days.

In response, a church member told me, "It's not our fence." Right away I knew I had to say something to you all Sunday ... today.

Folks, that's not true. Fitness Fun and Games is paying for the fence, and they've promised to keep it in good repair. They thought it up in the first place.

But legally, that fence is ours, and if anything happens, it's our job to handle it.

My point is that the world now sees Bethesda with a fenced playground and kids playing and ... both credit and blame land at our door.

That's the way life works. What the Great Fifty Days is trying to make us see is the good side of that.

From the outside, we look like an up and coming church. At no cost, we've been given the appearance at least of a whole new identity... as well as a continued source of income.

In those days and years of the first century of the Jesus movement, the church scrambled to describe, and gather, and eventually find people who could write down accounts of things that, in that dark and turbulent time in that troubled and suffering part of the world, looked upbeat, things that could get folks to look on the positive side of situations. In the first scripture for today, Peter, that hot-headed, warm-hearted but all-too-fearful disciple, not only brought back a beloved woman from death. Not only did all her church grieve and fear nothing would be done as well as she had done it ... but they had to deal with: Peter raising the dead.

I know. I know. This is Mother's Day, and whereas we'd thought we were going to do without it because there are so few of us and we're overworked and someone maybe forgot ... Look at us. Do you get the point, even as literally as that? It's like Holy Thursday supper and Easter Sunday's breakfast: a few devoted people did the work and everyone rejoiced.

Most of them were mothers, too.

Thanks be to God.

But before I had any of this worked out, I had to choose a title. Remember? Sunday night, Charles is on my case, rain or shine ... and all I could think of was the word "Madonna."

I wanted something sublime. Something worshipful. Something with encouragement in its heart. Something a little exotic and dreamy. Yet, down to earth. Mother Earth, after all. Something that took the wind out of the sails of masculinity without being cruel about it. Something absolutely clear about the hope in any situation, and the power of love, and ....so there it stood. Then came the leak, and my Lord, all the insults and noise and rage and disappointment and ... and I remembered that scene in the early days of Jesus when we're told "his mother and brothers were outside waiting to take him home, because they believed he was out of his mind." And by then the bulletin was printed and mailed, and I knew the sermon title was right, because even mothers can be mistaken, that's part of the news, isn't it?

The reason the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is so helpful is not because it avoids trouble .. you know it .. but because it conforms to reality. Good and bad are together in motherhood as they are everywhere else... It's a good psalm for this Sunday.

Then the Gospel of John. We've turned to him in these first of the Great Fifty Days that are supposed to help us see what faith in a living Christ is, truly. When the Jews challenge his authority, Jesus says, "If I told you how that is possible, you wouldn't believe me." As Bible commentator Fred Craddock says, "'Christ,' or 'Messiah,' is not an adequate term to identify who Jesus is. He is the Messiah, but the term had been so shaped by the expectations and wishes of the people that it was hardly possible to say yes to the question without creating false hopes.'" And again, Craddock reminds us that "in this Gospel, the Jews are not only the Jews, but they represent 'the world' that does not believe. Church history makes it abundantly clear that 'the world' is inside as well as outside the circle of disciples." And yet again, "in this" (John's) "Gospel, Jesus is the revelation ---

of God, from above, whose ministry is not contingent on any human act or word or request. Even toward his mother(2:3-4) , his brothers,(11:3-6) and his friends (11:3-6) Jesus behaves according to 'his hour' that is, all directives are from above."

With this I turn back to the situation in our church, and the meaning of motherhood.

Let us pray.

(Prayer, extemporaneous).

Amen.