

This Sunday's texts:

Jeremiah 29:1-14

Romans 12:1-5

Matthew 28: 16-20

Out of Hibernation: Purpose

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The Holy Gospel from Matthew, chapter 28, verses 16 to 20:

Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him - but some of them doubted! Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commandments I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The Gospel of the Lord. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, tune our hearts to your calling. Give us courage to respond, hope, and live in faith. Help us to know the gifts that you have given us that we might use them to your glory and to the blessing of this world in which we live. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Today begins a sermon series that is entitled "Out of Hibernation." We've been struggling to think of a metaphor that can mark this journey we've been in, in this season of Covid, this time when we've been asked to stay at home, social distance, and wear masks. We are recognizing that we are right on the cusp, we pray and hope and trust, of coming out of this time. But it isn't normal and it won't be a normal transition. So we've been asking the Lord and we've been searching the scripture to guide us into what it means to be coming out of this time, out of this time that has prevented us from doing a lot of things or has forced us to do things, but not in the way we've normally done them, and quite honestly, a time that is created some distances between us and those God has called us to love and serve. So we look to these texts to try to speak life into us, to speak courage into us, to allow the Word of the Lord to resonate in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

We start with this text from Jeremiah. It's a beautiful text. It's a text that is often quoted at least in part, but it is important to note the context. Jeremiah writes a letter to those who have been taken into exile. Again, similar to last week, where we looked at the defeated bones or, that is, the bones of the defeated army of the people of Israel in the desert that Ezekiel speaks to. Here, Jeremiah is writing a letter for God to those who have been defeated and taken into exile. They now live in the land of their enemies. Yet God says to them "I don't want you to live as defeated people. I don't want you to continue as enemies of King Nebuchadnezzar and of the Babylonians. Rather, I want you to build homes, plant gardens, marry your children, and have grandchildren. I want you to make a home there. I want you to literally pray for the Lord to bless your enemy and as they are blessed, as the welfare of the city goes, so goes your own welfare, so make it your home." There are all kinds of things happening in this culture in which we live which we might be uncomfortable with. We might even see them as opposition or restrictions of our freedoms, of our God-given callings. And yet, we don't treat the world as an enemy.

As I was growing up, one of the verses that was so important to me came from Romans 12. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind," by the changing of the way you think. I thought that I should not be conformed to this world because this world was my enemy, that I should be against it. But that was not right thinking. If we take this Romans 12 text and we look at it in light of the Jeremiah text, we realize that we can *not* be conformed to the world without the world being our enemy. We can, in fact, be transformed, so that we can serve the world and be instruments of its transformation. So not to think of this as a battle, but to recognize that we need to engage in life, with the power of God's hope and promise as our own, with the gifts that the spirit has provided for us so that we can bless this world. Jeremiah reminds us that God holds the future and it is a future of hope, a future of promise. So at this time, as we make this transition out of the hibernation of this Covid time and into the newness of life that is ahead of us, we trust, we pray, we hope that God holds our future and it is a future that is good, that is blessed and in fact, a future for which we have been blessed to be a blessing.

1 Corinthians 12:7 says “to each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good.” Each one of us has the Holy Spirit in us and the Holy Spirit manifests himself, makes himself known in and through us, so that the people around us are blessed. How do we move forward from this time? I say we allow the voice and the word of God. We allow the promise and the presence of the Holy Spirit in us to lead us out into the world, so that we can be a source of blessing, hope, and promise. I say to you, the people around us need that hope. They need that encouragement. I was looking at, I don't know - something on the news or YouTube - I don't know, but it suggested this idea that often when you're with people, they begin to mirror you. So if you're sullen and sad and concerned, they'll begin to mirror that sullenness. But if you are hopeful and joyful and smiling, very often you will elevate their day as well. You indeed will be a blessing to them and they will extend that blessing on to others as they walk away from you smiling. As we greet others with joy and gladness, it's quite possible that they will all go on to the next person and greet them with the same joy, with the same promise. We do it with an unyielding hope because of the faithfulness and goodness of God, that God is at work transforming us and blessing us to be a blessing in this world.

We are called out today in a new way. So I want us to hear the Great Commission, which is gospel text today, in a fresh way. I want us to hear how it begins, with Jesus declaring that all authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to him. So, as he speaks, as he gives this commission, as he gives you and me this calling, it's with authority. It's as our Lord. It's as Christ, the King. He says “go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all that I command you and remember, I'm with you always, even to the end of the age.” God is with us today. God is sending us out into the world today as his representatives, as his spokespersons. We share the Good News of God's love in Jesus. We let others know that our Lord Jesus invites them to follow him, invites them to embrace Jesus as Savior and as Lord of their lives, so that they too can be a part of the hope that we bring to the world.

It's a calling with a purpose. After being told so often over the last 15 months, stay home, stay away, keep your distance, Jesus says go, bless, baptize, teach, share the goodness of who I am with the world. Bring my hope, my life, and my spirit with you, as you encounter and

engage this world. Don't be conformed to it, but be a transformational presence. As the world begins to crawl out of this cave of hibernation, may they be greeted with your smile, with your love, with your encouragement and embrace, with the hope and promise of God for us.

CS Lewis, in his book *The Chronicles of Narnia*, has Lucy talking to Mr. Beaver and Mr. Beaver is talking about Aslan the King, the Christ-figure in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Mr. Beaver asks, "Is he safe?" A lot of us in this time are asking is it safe to come out again? Is it safe to embrace again? Lucy says to Mr. Beaver, "Safe? Who said anything about safe? Of course, it isn't safe, but he's good. He's the king, I tell you." I don't know whether it's safe. I don't know whether being a witness for Christ in our world is safe - probably not. I don't know whether it's safe to extend love to those who we barely know. I don't know whether it's safe to make ourselves vulnerable and share with the people of this world.

But I do know this. It's what we're called to do. In the goodness and love of God, under the authority of Jesus, our Savior and Lord, we are called to go. We are called to love. We are called to share the truth of the goodness of God who gave his Son, so that all could be forgiven and made right with God, and made right with each other. So we, under the authority of Christ, will go into this world and invite them into a relationship with us where we pray they will meet Jesus, in our hearts, in our lives, in our words, and in our actions, as we serve and enjoy the very presence of God among us. Saint Timothy's, brothers and sisters in Christ, go, therefore, into the world, speak hope, speak love, and do it in the faith and confidence of the promise and power and purpose of God for us, the Church. Amen.