

*“Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: When he is revealed we will be like him for we will see him as he is.” 1 John 3:2*

You know, there lives within each of us tension and unease. It’s part of life. There actually has to be tension... if we are alive and attentive to the world around us. We want to live in hope. We want it to be Easter for everyone, and yet there is so much difficulty and tragedy to face. We want our lives to be at peace. We want harmony and calm. And, we want to try to help where we can, right a wrong as we are able, and try make things better for others if possible. Jesus called that compassion.

When I walk in the woods and hear the birds chirping and the stream rippling over the rocks I feel peaceful. When I close my eyes and relax my limbs and breathe deeply I feel calm. When I read, as we have for two weeks in a row, Jesus telling the disciples in the Gospels, “Peace be with you,” I feel that peace. God has given us such gifts that we can only truly see when we have peaceful, grateful hearts.

And on the other side of things, I see how bad life is for many, many people. I want to be alive to the issues we face as a community and a nation. I read of all the gun violence and death in the news; every week there seems to be a new mass shooting this year, and so many young men of color are being killed, by the police and others. And I want to be part of the solution and not part of the problem...whatever small part that may be.

Certainly, as the writer of the First Letter of John says, we can be at peace when we trust God and know that more will be revealed to us as time goes by. What we understand from our Epistle this week is that even though we don’t see the world as a place where everyone lives in harmony and respect, we must not lose faith that it is happening, sometimes it seems to happen ever so slowly.

Mostly, Jesus teaches us that we cannot retreat into our houses and lock the door, put a blanket over our heads and succumb to helplessness and hopelessness. We must nurture our capacity for compassion.

“Why are you frightened? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?” Jesus asked the terrified disciples in the Gospel reading this week. (I imagine them with blankets over their heads.) Even though they had retreated into an upper room and locked the door, Jesus came to them. They could not hide from the risen Christ. They thought that Jesus was a ghost because, duh, people don’t rise from the dead. Here’s the important part. For the disciples that day, and for all those suffering this day, Jesus is our God come to us in the midst of impossible circumstances. Jesus is the Christ who is risen, even in this world of so much difficulty and death.

There are families right now that are saying to themselves, and to those around them, “Things can’t get any worse.” “Life is tragedy and injustice, useless violence and heartbreak.” Among those this week who must be feeling that way would be the families of Ja’Mari Preston, Rondall Tarez, Dante Wright, Adam Toledo and the families of those killed in Indianapolis on Thursday night. And those are just the ones we know about. It makes us feel angry and hopeless when we read about these deaths and think about how they could have been prevented. The Easter Day we keep hoping for seems to be turned back into Good Friday in an instant, over and over again.

Of course, we could just turn away (putting that blanket over our heads) saying, “That’s not my problem.” I don’t live in Hartford, or Minneapolis, Chicago or Indianapolis. But these problems of gun violence, fear and hate are our problems, Jesus taught us. He taught us to have compassion for one another.

We are all connected to each other and we are all responsible for each other in one degree or another. From people in a small developing country who cannot find any available vaccines, to those living with difficult political or economic hardships.

Our world has seen people fleeing those hardship of cruelty and injustice as long as we have recorded history. Think about the Israelites walking in hope in the wilderness towards the promised land. Think about the migrants walking from the countries in Central America heading to what they hope is the promised land, here in the US. God had compassion on those difficult Israelites. Jesus had compassion on the crowds. We must see each other as brothers and sisters and have compassion. We are all under God’s gracious care.

No matter how painful and intractable these situations are, we are asked through our faith in Jesus the Christ to seek equitable and humane solutions for difficult problems.

Remember stories of Jesus and the crowds? Too many people showed up at his mother in law’s house to be healed. He couldn’t possibly speak to each one, and he couldn’t even reach the people who were the sickest. Remember, one man was lowered into the house through the roof.

Too many people showed up on the hillside near Capernaum to hear Jesus preach and to be fed. How were Jesus and the disciples to feed everyone with five barley loaves and two fish. But did Jesus walk away from any of the difficulties he faced? Of course not. He had compassion.

The risen Christ reminded the disciples that they were given the immeasurable gift of seeing the resurrected Jesus and that because of that gift they had a job to do because. Jesus told them, *“You are witnesses of these things. [and so YOU] must proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins to ALL NATIONS starting [right here] in Jerusalem.” Luke 24:47-48*

And at the same time, Jesus told the disciples “Peace be with you.”

There's that tension again...between seeking to find peace within ourselves and our community, and striving for a better world, a connected world. Let our Easter gift from Jesus today be the gift of compassion. How will you use that gift today?