

Sermon May 10 2020

Grace, Mercy and Peace from God our father and from our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

As we enter the 5th week of our Easter Season, I wish to extend our Easter greetings to everyone. This is the season of celebration for God's gift of everlasting life, given to us in our lord Jesus Christ, and we give thanks to God for being able to gather around God's word, to listen for the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, and respond in faith to God's gracious invitation to trust this word. May we be strengthened in this time of testing, that we may be found faithful and trusting in God's providential care for us, his church, and the world God made.

I also want to wish all of our mothers, and those who provide motherly attention to any and all manner of creature, a very Happy and Healthy mothers' day. We give thanks to our mothers, for their gifts to us, for forming and molding us through nurture and care, and for their role in making us the people we are today. We want to ask God to bless new and newer mothers especially, who are facing unique challenges in this time of quarantine and stay-at-home living and schooling. When we are limited by this pandemic and can interact with fewer social and community resources, we are left to tend to more of our family's time and nurture on our own, and this can be stressful, complicated, and exhausting. And may God bless all who provide parental attention and love in this time. These bonds are fundamental to who we are, and their importance shines out in such times of unprecedented challenge.

For those who would normally be visiting your mothers today in person, enjoying each other's company, and eating or having a party together, we ask that God would give us grace as we maintain our distance, call on the phone, visit through the nursing home window, or visit from the end of the driveway. God knows we need this physical proximity, and we ask that we may soon be delivered from our present affliction, that we can be with one another again in the most healing and healthful ways.

My fellow members, we must take heart in our current crisis. There will come a day when we can once again gather, when we can once again rub shoulders in public, when we can hug or shake hands, when we can be with one another in

public in the way we want. But it may take some more time. It may take a long time for things to return to what we knew. Be that as it may, we set our hearts and minds on a future filled with hope. We pray for those who have been directly affected by the virus, and for those who help care for them. We trust that we already possess the skill and know-how in our society to find a vaccine, and we pray for patience to weather these next several months, while we wait to feel that trust in our common humanity, and in the new rules that we will live by to facilitate the easing of restrictions on our social interaction.

In the meantime, we take our sustenance from the Word of God and that “pure spiritual milk of the Gospel” as Peter says in our second scripture lesson this morning. What is this spiritual Mother’s milk, but the gracious promises of our Lord Jesus Christ to make us one in his body, to make of us a people set apart for God’s purpose in the world, which is to bear witness in word and deed to the presence of God’s grace and mercy in our world, through the power of the Holy Spirit. In our second Lesson this morning, Peter writes to his fellow Christians, that this house of God, made up of the people who are called in faith, stands on the foundation of Christ’s death and resurrection, a foundation that is set by God, but misunderstood by the rest of the world. You and I are invited even now to reunite with our baptismal identities as God’s children, and become again a people who trust in God before things of this world, a people who are called to follow in the way of the cross, and who are called to live according to the rules of a kingdom that is not yet fully come. Peter pleads with his audience not just to come to Christ, but to stick with him. Peter writes: “4 Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and 5 like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

On this Mother’s day, this day to honor those persons who have had the most fundamental influence on our development, the church allows itself to be built up into the image of its all-loving parent. In all our struggles now, we look to the Gospel to feed us, sustain us, and give us hope.

Trusting in God’s motherly affection and nurture has not been easy. I like you am so easily influenced by the world we live in. Especially in this last week, I too have had my hopes dashed by the growing idea that even as restrictions are lifted, we

won't be comfortable nor truly safe enough to go out, to live and play and gather together in public for some time to come. I too have been struggling to understand why at a time of unprecedented demand for food assistance, farmers in our country must destroy their own produce, dump millions of gallons of milk, kill entire herds of pigs, and otherwise waste the fruit of the earth and other resources just because we don't have the flexibility in our food supply chain to repackage and move these resources to where they can be safely consumed. And I too become despondent because of the reckless and racist ways some folks behave towards others in our culture.

But because of God's promises, because of God's nurturing presence, I am still hopeful for a return to normalcy. I am hopeful for a vaccine. I am hopeful for a new age of government for the people, one that is well prepared for calamities, that has a plan when disaster strikes. I am hopeful for a time in our society when racism is a thing of the past, where guns are merely for sport, where people come together in trust and not in fear, a society where justice is swift and fair.

And I am hopeful that the church in our time can become a community that leads with patience and forbearance, and has the desire to see the opportunity in this time of crisis, and advocate for change in the way we do things so that we can realize a fairer, more just and compassionate world. How will this be accomplished? Why remain hopeful for such a future? Because Christ is risen from the tomb. It is because of Easter, it is because we are an Easter people, and it is because we believe in the God of resurrection, who is doing a new thing in our midst, who is building us up into a temple of his own construction, according to his own specifications and requirements. This built environment that Christ is making is intended to become a refuge for the weary, a shelter for the oppressed, a relief for those who stand accused, and a signpost for those who have lost hope. Thus, the church is called to be this new construction, and to stand at the crossroads of our human life and reach out to the world in love, compassion and mercy.

So now, my Christian brothers and sisters, you must let yourselves be built, as living stones, into this holy temple that looks forward to the dawning of the fulness of God's kingdom in our world. I am preaching this first to Christians, but also to any who are familiar with Christ's life and teachings. You must let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, that like a good mother in your life, is

generous with her time and patience, and protects your faith and your hope and your dreams. Let yourselves be built into this spiritual house, which is God's mansion, the realm of many abiding spaces, a spacious and generous house that can accommodate all of God's people, and bring them together, so to speak, under one roof.

This house of God is being prepared for you even as it is being made out of you. You are to be made into the house that is begin prepared for you, and eventually, for all people, as Jesus says in our Gospel lesson this morning. "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" What is that place of welcome and gracious acceptance, but the motherly bosom of our loving God, who rises in joy to welcome us as we turn towards home in humility and repentance. You who have turned toward God in faith and trust, be ever more pliable in your extenuating circumstances, be ever more moldable in the image of our savior's love, be ever more resilient under the pressure of our present moment, and continue to serve your neighbor as Christ served you.

When I think of a mansion, I think of the popular television series, Downton Abby. Now THAT was a house. Downton Abby was a fictional aristocratic estate in England at the turn of the 20th century. The main house was a small castle, with several floors of rooms and chambers and halls, and accompanying grounds, acres of beautiful lawns, a winding approach road, and gardens in pristine condition. This was the house of Lord and Lady Grantham, and the house was shared by members of their family, their kids and grandkids, and a bustling staff of servants. In the movie version of the series, the occasion that brought the house to its thriving best was the visit of the king of England. The task of preparation was monumental, a true "all-hands-on-deck" moment. The cleaning of house and preparation of grounds had to be just so. The right flowers needed to be picked and placed in the right places, the right lighting, the right china, the right silver, the right food, the right drink, all had to be prepared to the highest standards, everything quaffed perfectly in preparation for the royal guests. Part of the charm of the show was following almost ritual care the servants took for their duties; which servant got to wear which uniform, who got to serve what, who got to attend to which guest, all according to their staff rank and position. On the eve of the royal visit, they worked like a hive of bees, cleaning and preparing the many rooms, setting furniture in just the right position, and all according to

predetermined standards. And in the dining room, the concentrated center of all their cultured hospitality, they set and then measured the distances between tables and chairs, forks and plates, glasses and bowls, with a ruler.

Well, my fellow Christians, we are called to be those servants, working in the house of the Lord that the Lord is preparing for us. Yes, you heard me right. WE are working now in the house that the lord is preparing for us. Do not think for a minute that this metaphor of a mansion is simply for some heaven above the clouds. And it is certainly not an actual building. No, in a proper Christian eschatology, or anticipation of God's presence, this house that Jesus prepares for us is his own body in the world, a body of people who are reconciled to one another not by region or ethnicity or language or even religion, but reconciled only by Christ's love and forgiveness. In fact, the reality of the resurrection points to the promise in the book of Revelation, chapter 21, of the dawning of a new heaven and a new earth. This is the new thing that Christ is making in us and for us, the new thing that the risen Christ is doing with us in preparation for the dawning of his own realm of complete redemption, where those things that were lost will be found again, where those things that were broken will be fixed, where those things that have been neglected will be restored.

It is in trying to imagine this new reality, this new edifice or mansion that God is building, that we speak in a most curious way about the future as being already here. We are called to work now for that reconciliation which is coming soon, and has arrived, to prepare now for that justice which is dawning on the horizon, and has already risen. We are called to get ready for the arrival of OUR royal guest, even as he is already with us. This is what Peter means when he says that we are that holy priesthood, servants of God's holy temple, servants who must live now as if the bridegroom is on the way to his party. We must live now as if Christ HAS arrived in Glory.

And as he arrives, he comes as judge, to corrects the wrongs that have been committed. He comes as master builder and sets right all things that have been neglected or ignored. He comes as wisdom incarnate and corrects all ungodly thinking, corrects the worldly thinking that pits people against one another, and judges all impulses to selfish thinking that puts me and mine above you and yours.

That day will be the end of our mortal frailty, the end of disease and trauma, the end of injustice and suffering. This is the day that Easter points to, that says look, the Lord of life is alive, and his is coming back for us all. This is that Easter moment in the vision of the prophet Isaiah, ch. 25, who says of that day:

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples

a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines,

of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear.

And he will destroy on this mountain

the shroud that is cast over all peoples,

the sheet that is spread over all nations;

he will swallow up death for ever.

Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,

and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,

for the Lord has spoken.

It will be said on that day,

Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.

This is the Lord for whom we have waited;

let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

May this Easter proclamation comfort you in our time, and may the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.

For the prayers of the church:

For Ed Stengel, for Jan and Gary Greten, for Abby, For Dorothy, for Bob Wortmann, recovering from surgery, Kim Daenkhe, Shawn Sweeney, Frank Terrizzi, Carolyn Pacenza, Thomas Sabo, the Haugeto family

Family and Friends of

Sally Daubenberger

Family and Friends of

Francis Petermann
Family and Friends of State
Trooper Rick Vanderclock