

March 17, 2024

Pr. Steve

Texts: Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Psalm 51; John 12: 20-28

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus had a body. He breathed like us. He walked this earth—and some people liked him.

We preach and teach the Resurrection of the Body. I don't think any other religion does that. Isn't that strange, isn't it? I know these come to hurt and [be] painful, and I know that's part of the experience. But resurrection of the body, Paul said 2000 years ago, 'What that looks like we don't know. But what this is a deep, down affirmation of the Incarnation, that everything that God has made is good and beautiful—we, our bodies, our lives, the creatures, the earth—it's all good. And it shall be resurrected.' [1 Corinthians 15: 35]

The church is the body of Christ, wherever we are alive, and active, and healing into wholeness, the brokenness that is around us, or within us—there is the church. It's not just words or a philosophy, a theology in a sanctuary. It's us—living the life-dance of grace.

*Ecclesia* is the Greek word from which we get church—ecclesiastical. *Ecclesia*—means the listening ones. The Church means the listening ones. In our meditation today, we gave ourselves to Listening—to listen in order to discern. How do we embody God's grace? Not with formulas. We listen because to listen is everything.

How the church ever got into this 'Saving Souls' business, I'll never know—as if it's an operation, '*we gotta grab them, and convince, and convert*' ...' We are here to listen, because each of you is how God is making God's love known—it is embodied. Our loving is the way God's secrets get told.

'*Now my hour has come,*' we hear in the Gospel text today. '*My hour has come.*' [John 12: 23] What is that? It is the final and total confrontation by Jesus with evil. There are some who sought to destroy his body, destroy his life, destroy his teachings—but the truth is all of us resist and reject the truth of the Gospel—that all of us are God's beloved sons and daughters, creating a new community on earth. And we go, '*Don't make me go there!*' All of us resist and reject the compassion of God, which is indiscriminate, unconditional, falling upon the good, the bad, the wicked, equally. '*That can't be!*' All of us resist and reject the mercy of God, the longing in our hearts for that mercy is so deep, it is so desperate and overwhelming.

But we're not sure how many others deserve it. In fact, we distort it so greatly that we won't let God be merciful. Right underneath we all know that underneath, right under the radar, God is out to judge us—he can't wait for the final days to come cast us into hell.

Can you say an Amen to that? Here is Jesus— a lifetime getting crucified to make the compassion of God real, alive, sustaining us with every good gift we need—and we lie about God. We resist and we reject being kind.

Now I know there's plenty of other people we don't want to be kind to, but we resist being kind to ourselves. Is that right? Yeah, right because—because if I was kind to myself, well then, what would that mean? What would that mean? So, we're seriously fighting this one. It's a real struggle to be kind to ourselves. "*I don't think so, do you?*" We are such strange creatures, aren't we? We are. We like people to be kind to us all the time, but kindness toward ourselves? We draw a limit there.

In last week's text, we heard the story of Moses lifting the serpent onto the staff, yes? Why? The people had been besieged with this horde of vipers slithering all over them, they'd taken ill, and they were being poisoned by these vipers—stinging them with lies, and deceit, and greed, and jealousy, and envy—and they're just overwhelmed. Can you imagine living in a world like that? How terrible that would be, if everybody was lying, and you couldn't find the truth anywhere, and you're getting so fatigued, and you were giving up to despair, and you wonder what your life was about. And Moses puts that very symbol on a staff, and says, '*Look at this. Look at what is undoing you, look at what is contaminating you, and poisoning you so you can see through it.*' [Numbers 21:8] That's in the Bible. Yeah, that's why we keep using this Book. Who talks like that?

And then, John and the Gospel picks up that same theme and image. He says, 'Just as the Son of Man (remember that)—the *bar anasha*, the new humanity, the new humanity through Jesus—just as the Son of Man is lifted up on to the cross for loving us too much, so the Son of Man will be lifted up from the grave, [John 12: 32] and lifted up into the heavens—so that we can be lifted up into a new humanity.' It's all for us, to lift us up—who are overwhelmed by days of despair and tempted to resign and quit.

We're the ones Christ is lifting up, so now that Covenant which has been inscribed on our hearts, imprinting God's indelible compassion and wisdom within us, can speak to us every time we listen.

It's always here. It's always right here. It's always in the community. It's always in the Scriptures. We are always in God's presence, when we listen—and even when we can't listen. In this meal we get to taste the infusion, the ingestion, and the digestion of the body and the blood of Christ.

Amen.

The peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.