

April 26 - Saturday

*And baptism, which this prefigured,
now saves you—
not as a removal of dirt from the body,
but as an appeal to God
for a good conscience,
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
who has gone into heaven
and is at the right hand of God,
with angels, authorities,
and powers made subject to him.*

1 Peter 3:21-22

Did you know that most of the earth's surface consists of water; there is more water than there is land and approximately 66% of the human body consists of water. (Water Facts Trivia) There a lot of interesting facts about water, a very common substance that most often people take for granted. Jesus uses the image of the living water as a metaphor of who he is – fresh water that quenches the thirst of the spirit. Two significant events in the Old Testament history – Noah’s flood and the crossing of the Red Sea in the exodus story involve water. In the New Testament the use of water is highlighted in the baptismal rite, drawing its significance from the stories of the past.

This is what Peter did when he speaks about Noah’s experience of being ‘saved through water’ and uses the image as prefiguring our own baptism. Just as Noah was saved through the waters of the flood, we too were saved through the waters of our baptism. The New Jerusalem Bible translated verse 21a this way, “*It is the baptism corresponding to this water which saves you now....*”

Baptism is a movement illustrating death to life. Paul’s imagery made baptism’s significance clearer when he wrote; “*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.* (Romans 6:3-4)

What kind of memories comes to our mind when we touch fresh and flowing waters in our hands? Many remember the pristine rivers they swam when we were children, the refreshing coolness that water brings to the body during summer heat, the laughter and the voices of mothers and children blended with the sound of water flowing through the streams as they gather to wash clothes on Saturday morning. But what about remembering what baptism means every time we come across water – whether we drink, we take a bath or just enjoy the serene and idyllic beauty of water in a green lake or in the calm blue ocean? Remembering above all the Creator of the universe and Jesus whose death and rising to life again points to what baptismal waters is all about.

Prayer

O Lord, our God, let every drop of water reminds us of the new life that our baptism signifies. Amen.

April 25 - Friday

*He was put to death in the flesh,
but made alive in the spirit,
in which also he went
and made a proclamation
to the spirits in prison,
who in former times did not obey,
when God waited patiently
in the days of Noah,
during the building of the ark,
in which a few, that is, eight persons,
were saved through water.*

1 Peter 3:18b-20

Aquada – this is the name of the \$235,000 car that can be used both in land and in water designed by the Gibbs Technology of Britain. We saw this before in James Bond movies but today it is for real. Yes, this vehicle can hit 100 miles per hour on land as a car and as a speedboat it can go as far as 30 miles per hour on water. (CBS News – September 3, 2003)

The risen Jesus can move between the world of the flesh and the world of the spirit. He joined and ate with the disciples during meals. In this letter to the churches, Peter speaks of Jesus who *went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison...* Our church went through Confirmation Class using the Apostles Creed as the framework of study and discussion. One of the lines in the creed states that He (the risen Jesus) descended into hell. This text in 1 Peter 3:18-20 explains that phrase. “Descended into hell” refers to the grave, the place of the dead. In the tradition of the early church, Jesus went to the place of the dead to preach to the spirits, they who died long time ago, they who died without hearing the gospel. Paul in his letter to the church in Rome captured the risen Christ’s nature in these words – *For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.* (Romans 14:9)

When we talk to people about the good news that Jesus brought into us, it is not uncommon to hear people asking – what about those who died and did not hear about Jesus? If you ask Peter, this is what he will tell you – this risen Christ can go and proclaim to the spirits, in other words, don’t worry Jesus can handle that, so get focus, it’s not about them but it’s about us today – who hear the gospel and whose lives are claimed by Jesus, the risen Lord. Will we obey or deny him having been offered the gift of salvation. He reminded believers about the time of Noah *when God waited patiently*, only eight were saved from the waters. This God who waited patiently comes to us to us flesh and blood in Jesus Christ, *He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit...* Today, he is Lord both of the living and the dead!

Prayer

What else can we say?

*You claim us whether in life or in death.
Jesus, You are indeed Lord and Savior. Amen.*

April 24 - Thursday

*For Christ also suffered for sins once for all,
the righteous for the unrighteous,
in order to bring you to God.
He was put to death in the flesh,
but made alive in the spirit...*

1 Peter 3:18

Inscribed in the 500 Philippine Peso bill is the face of Ninoy Aquino with a typewriter print of his famous quote, “The Filipino is worth dying for.” Ninoy’s assassination upon his arrival at the Manila International Airport from exile in the U.S. triggered the People Power Revolution in 1986 that ousted the conjugal dictatorship of the late President Marcos and his wife Imelda.

There is also one event that took place on Calvary that Christians keep looking back – the crucifixion of Jesus. That painful, agonizing and shameful death of an innocent man – the righteous one as Peter pointed out. He suffered and died not just for a particular country or a particular people but for all the unrighteous. He went through this horrible experience “*to bring you to God.*”

There is nothing elegant about suffering. I do not believe that Christians should seek suffering as something to be desired. Suffering comes to us as a consequence if we are given the choice to stand for our faith, if it is demanded from us. Yesterday’s text said, *For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil.* (v.17)

Jesus suffering on the cross is a sacrifice that cannot be repeated. It is a once and for all event. The annual reenactment of flagellation

and crucifixion by persons in the Philippines cannot and will not bring anybody to God, not even for them who performed it, even though how bloody and painful their experience was. Our calling is not to reenact the crucifixion in the literal sense but to find meaning in our sufferings – in what ever form it is – in the suffering of Christ.

One of the things that I cannot forget about my Lolo (grandpa) was the comment he made when my uncle was murdered. In the funeral rite he said, ‘we should not be surprised that pain and suffering and tears comes to us... when we came into this world none of us came out from our mother’s womb laughing but crying.’” At times, suffering comes for no rational or apparent reason at all. In our suffering we look at Jesus on the cross and know that we are not alone in our pains. We look up to Jesus who suffered and died with the fervent faith that we too who suffer and die will live with him.

Prayer

*Thank you Jesus for dying on our behalf
Help us find meaning
of our suffering in your suffering. Amen.*

April 23 - Wednesday

*Keep your conscience clear,
so that, when you are maligned,
those who abuse you
for your good conduct in Christ
may be put to shame.
For it is better to suffer for doing good,
if suffering should be God's will,
than to suffer for doing evil.*

1 Peter 3:16b-17

The word translated as conscience refers to “the consciousness of anything or the soul as distinguishing between what is morally good and bad and prompting or commending to do the former and shun the latter.” (Greek Lexicon G4893) *Keep your conscience clear...* is an advice that points to the strength of inner disposition that enables a person to stand firm and true to one’s faith regardless of the consequence of the choice one made in favor of what is morally good.

In April 2004, a shocking and shameful report of torture and abuse of prisoners in the infamous Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq became public. Investigations and congressional hearings were done and the whole episode sets the critical debate on the ethics of war. Unknown to many was the fact that the whole investigation and the final report of this incident falls on the hand of Major General Cesar Taguba, a two star Army General of Filipino ancestry. He is a son of a survivor of the Bataan Death March and a mother who helped Japanese Prisoners of War in Manila on WWII, whose personal experiences of atrocities were shared to him as a child. General Taguba’s conscience cannot condone torture, he deeply believes that “torture is un-lawful.” But in the eyes of some of those who are in the corridors of power whether in the military or in the government, General Taguba betrayed his calling as a soldier by not protecting the men and women and the whole institution itself from disgrace. On January 2006, Taguba received a phone call from the Army's Vice-Chief of Staff who offered no reason but said, "I need you to retire by January of 2007." This Taguba did after 34 years of active duty. (Asian-American-soldiers-of-conscience - <http://thehollytree.blogspot.com>)

Day by day, we make decisions but mostly not as big as what General Taguba faced. But these simple questions may help us as we walk this road whatever vocation we are called to be, “Is my conscience clear?” or “Can I sleep peacefully at night knowing what I’ve done?” or “If I die today, can I rest in peace with the choice I made.” Jesus puts it differently, “*For what profit is it to a*

man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Matthew 16:26a) Keep your conscience clear!

Prayer

*‘Keep my conscience clear.’
This is my prayer, O God
Guide and help me. Amen.*

April 22 - Tuesday

*... Always be ready to make your defense
to anyone who demands from you
an accounting for the hope that is in you;
yet do it with gentleness and reverence.*

1 Peter 3:15b-16a

“Never put a period where God puts a comma.” This quote from Gracie Allen, the wife of the late actor George Burns is used by our denomination, the United Church of Christ as the ad slogan of the “God is Still Speaking” initiative. It describes best what Peter wanted to portray as one of the distinctive characters of those who believe in the risen Christ – Hope. Believers are people of hope not of dread and despair, people who look forward to something bigger and brighter. This is what the comma represents. A period puts an end to everything, there is no tomorrow in a period.

On Good Friday, the devil thought that Jesus death was the period that puts everything into its final conclusion. But on Easter Sunday, God made another stroke by transforming the definitive period into a dancing comma – through Christ’s resurrection death has been stripped of its power and its victory. We live our lives in hopeful anticipation of what God unfolds day after day, even beyond what this life can offer. A document in the mid 2nd Century (*Epistle to Diognetus*, 5-6), describes the life of Christians this

way.

They love all people, and by all are persecuted. They are unknown, and still they are condemned; they are put to death, and yet they are brought to life. They are poor, and yet they make many rich . . . They are reviled, and yet they bless; when they are affronted, they still pay due respect . . . To put it simply: What the soul is in the body, that Christians are in the world.

The world was turned upside down by their character and their conduct that people started to ask questions about the hope that is in them. Peter advises the church be ready, be prepared to answer but with two conditions, respond with gentleness and reverence. In the New Living Translation (NLT) it says, “... *always be ready to explain it. But you must do this in a gentle and respectful way.*”

Why did Peter give this instruction? Can one speak about faith and hope in the risen Christ other than being in a gentle and respectful way? We know *how* to be hopeful in spite and despite of all the odds we face in life. Above all we know *why* we are hopeful. God’s call and challenge for us today is to share the hope that is in us in a gentle and respectful way!

Prayer:

*Thank you God
for the hope that keeps us going.
Teach us to share it
in a gentle and respectful way. Amen.*

April 21 - Monday

*Now who will harm you
if you are eager to do what is good?
But even if you do suffer
for doing what is right, you are blessed.*

*Do not fear what they fear,
and do not be intimidated,
but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord.*

1 Peter 3:13-15a

Phobia is the word for fear. The expanding list had grown to 530 known phobias, listing even the bizarre and the strange fears people have like fear of number 13, Triskadekaphobia and even fear of the color yellow, Xanthophobia. *Do not fear...do not be intimidated*, this Biblical advice is sprinkled all over its pages as it record the struggles of God's people in the Old Testament and the early church.

Put yourself on the shoes of the women and men during the time of Peter. That moment when being a Christian was not fancy and fabulous. It was a time of trial and persecution for a people who lived life differently – a life like that of Christ, willing to suffer for doing what is right. This is the context of the advice - *Do not fear...do not be intimidated*.

Today, we are not called to stand in the middle of a coliseum and be devoured by lions and tigers to entertain people or if not our bodies dipped in oil and use as torches to provide the much needed light on a dark evening. The least of the consequences of being faithful to Christ then would be dispossession and imprisonment for accusation ranging from arson to sedition. The season of Easter reminds us that death, the much dreaded power, the worst that evil can do, has no dominion over those who put their trust in the risen Christ, they who sanctify him as Lord and Savior in their hearts.

What kind of fears and intimidations that we Christians face today? Maybe a little bit of ridicule for putting our faith on Jesus who lived and died and rose to life again 2,000 years ago, for following a way of life that puts God first rather than our self, for listening and discerning God's voice in the Bible and the community that gather to worship and pray... a little bit of ridicule, a sarcastic look from friends or a cold treatment from those who lump as with religious nuts.

Peter asked; *who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?* There are those who are willing to harm us today, maybe not physically but at least pull the rug from our feet and shake our foundation causing us to ask whether faith in Christ is worth living and dying for. As we seek our balance, God's word comes fresh and alive – *Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord.*

Prayer

*In our fears and in our doubts,
whisper gently to us, O God
do not fear, do not be intimidated. Amen.*