

2 Easter – Year C – April 14, 2010 - Homily
Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 150; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31
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“Begin at the beginning,” the King said, very gravely, “and go on till you come to the end: then stop.” So writes Lewis Carroll in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. It is timely reminder, and aptly describes our own lives today. Jesus is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, so where does that leave us? Jesus is the beginning and the ultimate end of all creation, and all humanity, so where are we now? In Eugene Peterson’s fascinating commentary on Revelation titled *Reversed Thunder*, he suggests that Christians, of all the people in the world, are most conscious of “living in the middle”.

In the beginning, God in Christ created the world. We are celebrating the Easter season reveling in the joy of God in Christ redeeming the world. Yet, the reality is that we are still living in a world that does not seem to be living up to the promise of that glorious redemption. In fact, based on a cursory glance at the state of the world today, there are many who would say that there couldn’t possibly be a god, let alone a God so powerful as to bring life out of death.

This is when it’s good for us to remember that between the Alpha and the Omega, which are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, there are all the other letters. Between our A to Z, there is the rest of our alphabet. And that A to Z canvas incorporates every single word that can *be*, at least in the English language. Jesus is the Word made flesh, the incarnate and Living God. Jesus is the Logos, the eternal Word and creator of the universe. In His outstretched arms on the cross, the Word made flesh embraced all that ever was, is, or will be in this world, bringing us out of sin and death into new life. We now know what the end is. Jesus gives the gift of eternal life to all who believe in Him. What gets a little confusing for us is the alphabet-spaghetti soup of daily life. Living in the middle.

John, the writer of the Book of Revelation, describes his own life in the middle – it is one of exile, suffering, and patient endurance. John has been preaching and teaching the Gospel, and it has got him imprisoned on a far away island. He has been exiled on Patmos to stop him from disturbing the peace. He is sent out of the way so that the rest of the world can go on living the way it wants to live, without being bothered by the inconvenient challenge presented by news of Christ’s life, death and resurrection. Well, at least that’s how it seems at first, until he is given the gift of this vision recorded for us in the Book of Revelation.

John tells us that we are blessed to read this prophecy, to hear it, and to live it. God is reminding us that Jesus was among us, a flesh and blood human being walking the earth, as well as a physical presence in His transformed and resurrected body. It is a highly tactile prophecy and requires all our senses to see, hear and feel it, including senses beyond the mundane. John’s prophetic words are meant to be read and heard in community. The prophecy is supposed to be lived out in the Body of Christ.

First and foremost, this passage from Revelation declares God’s grace and peace to all Christians living in the middle between the beginning and the end. What kind of grace is this? What kind of peace? Our English word ‘grace’ fails to capture the intricate essence of the deeper meaning behind this greeting. God’s grace is about God’s loving-kindness towards us. God’s grace is about all that brings us joy. It is about mercy and God’s abundant gifts. It is

unearned forgiveness, and all that draws us towards God. Grace means God's gift that enables us to understand who God is, how to love God more fully, and to desire God with all our heart, mind and body. In the midst of all that was happening to the early church at that time, and in the midst of our own lives – John's word of grace from God is a much-needed reminder of what is really important in life. God's gift of grace shows us where we have come from, where we are going, and all that God has done for us.

With such a remarkable opening, who could not want the peace that Jesus bestows on us as well as God's grace? Jesus' peace is an experience that surpasses all our understanding. We catch a glimpse, a sense of what it means in the more nuanced description of the original Greek, but understanding here is brought to life in experience. As important to John and the early church as it is to us now, Jesus' peace means to be free from the rage and havoc of war. Divine peace is harmony among and between all people, encompassing safety, security, and prosperity. Sounds like something the world sorely needs, doesn't it? It is idyllic peace. A world where there is no violence. A world where there is only God's abundance, and the knowledge that it is always enough. God's grace and peace is truly a description of the fulfillment of God's promise in Christ, redeeming this fallen and sin-filled world to a state of complete intimacy and reconciliation with God.

As followers of Christ, living in the middle, we are compelled to live in hope, to hold on to the deeper reality, which is the mystery behind what we see, hear, smell and so on with our limited human senses. And so John's words are meant to encourage us. The Book of Revelation tells us repeatedly that Jesus is with us. Jesus is living with us through the trials and struggles of this world. Jesus is still healing and helping us, pouring out His grace and peace into us, and through the Body of Christ we are called to share this grace and peace with all those we know and are yet to meet. John's words are words of encouragement so that we might live into the kingdom of God's grace-filled and peace-filled reign inaugurated through Jesus' life, death and resurrection. He has made us to be a kingdom to continue His work of reconciliation and healing.

So here we are. We might say that we are stuck in the middle – kind of like being squeezed between our love for God and the violence of the world, making it hard to reconcile the two. Or, we might choose put our trust and faith in God's gifts of grace and peace, sharing those gifts as members of the Living Word. What is the Gospel message that we proclaim in Christ's name? What has He called us to do, but to spell out a message of H-O-P-E and of L-O-V-E by living in and through God's Word? We may grumble a bit that we are stuck in the middle, or we may offer our thanks and praise for this time and place, however difficult today was, because we begin each day with Jesus, and we will go on until we share our end in Him.

Amen.