

**4 Easter – Year C – April 28, 2010 - Homily**  
**Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30**  
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Our Vestry have been discussing the ways that we believe God is calling us to grow in this place including: growth in our outreach to the community; spiritual growth of our members through Bible study, prayer, worship and other spiritual disciplines; growth in the number of parishioners who participate in sharing their spiritual gifts; and growth in our facility as part of our outreach efforts and to accommodate growth in our numbers, especially dedicated space for children and youth. While we often say that the church is a part of the world, and apart from it, at least in our values and way of life, there is one way that the community of faith should reflect the world. That is to have members in roughly the same proportion as can be found in the broader community. In other words, we should offer an inviting and welcoming spiritual home to God's children from all age groups, from every ethnic thread, from each gender, and from all socio-economic classes. I readily admit that this is much easier said than done. Communities have a tendency to become more, not less, homogeneous or uniform over time. There are challenges, but it is a worthy vision for us all to work towards, because it is a vision that moves us closer to establishing a slice of the heavenly kingdom right here and now.

John's vision from the Book of Revelation is no less a part of establishing God's kingdom on earth now than it was in the first century. John says, "I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count..." These are all God's witnesses standing before the throne of God and the Lamb, proclaiming salvation in Jesus' name. Whenever we meet to worship the Lord, we include these words from the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Well, one thing we know from this reading of Revelation is that in heaven there is a great and diverse mass of people worshipping God and Christ. When we walk outside these doors, we see the same kind of diversity – all God's children, some of whom already worship the Lord, and many who do not yet know Him.

This is God's promise in Revelation, "They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;... for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." John's world was full of hunger – many of the landowners had deliberately ordered tenant farmers to grow cash crops, rather than grain for food. With the consequent shortages, prices for staple grain were highly inflated, and so many people were starving. Periodic droughts were also a problem, directly and negatively affecting the harvest, but also impacting livestock, and sources of drinking water for the people. Alleviating thirst was not just a matter of turning on the tap. It often meant many miles of walking to reach a well or river, and carrying jars of water back home.

We might be tempted to think that hunger is not really a big problem in the U.S. Not so. According to Bread for the World's website, between 2003 and 2005, twelve percent of Arizona's population did not know where their next meal was coming from. That's over seven hundred thousand children, women and men in this state alone. You already know how severe the problem of hunger is in the poorest parts of the world. So what about the water situation? As of April 20<sup>th</sup> this year, most of the State of Arizona is classified by the National Weather Service as experiencing drought. Much of Northern Arizona is in extreme drought. Because most of us have deep wells, or city water on tap, there is perhaps no sense of the imperative to

conserve water, but we just have to look at the trees to know how serious the drought is. In fact, the whole world is groaning under cries of hunger and thirst. John's vision tells us that this is not God's desire for creation, or for God's children. This is not God's way for the world.

The promise that we will hunger and thirst no more is not just a future promise to be fulfilled in the heavenly kingdom. God's provision is more than a spiritual promise as well. God's promise for the restoration and reconciliation of the world applies now. The earliest Christian communities worked hard to share what they had so that none amongst them went hungry or thirsty. Christian communities across the world still work to alleviate hunger and its best friend, poverty. Christians throughout the world continue to advocate for changes to inequitable and unjust systems ensuring the fair distribution of goods, and fair prices for crops. This community makes its own contribution through organizations like The Love Kitchen, Shepherds' Kitchen, White Mountain Meals on Wheels, the Bread of Life Mission, and our partner in ministry, FaithWorks. Our outreach fundraising efforts also support international relief agencies like Episcopal Relief & Development, Lutheran World Relief, Heifer International, and SERRV who support fair trade and micro-lending practices. Each of these international organizations has invested significant resources in the hardest hit and most poverty-stricken regions of the world.

Since God's promises are as relevant to our current lives as they are to our eternal lives, we have some really good news to share to the multitude who do not yet know Christ, and for those who have lost their way to God's altar. Yet, it is no surprise that we are working against the pervasive cultural grain, even as we are working as co-creators with God. John Howard Yoder makes the point excellently when he writes, "[People] who bear crosses are working with the grain of the universe... sharing the life of those who sing about the Resurrection of the slain Lamb." The converse is true when we meet the world! Our values are not in line with the values of many we will meet. The fruit of our victory in Christ is made visible in our witness. That is a witness that is congruent with the character and purpose of Jesus Christ, who triumphed over sin and death on the cross. We share in the victory of the cross by participating in the humility of that triumph. Humility that is found in the so-called weak power of loving and serving others, and the foolish wisdom of losing ourselves for Christ's sake. As Paul says in his first letter to the church in Corinth (1:27), "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong".

As every caregiver knows, we cannot help others unless we stay healthy. The growth of our community of faith begins with you and me, our own spiritual health, and our own growth. Our capacity to welcome others is directly related to our spiritual spaciousness and graciousness in Christ. We have what so many in the world need. We have good news of hope, healing, comfort, and everlasting life. Our challenge is to embody each of these gifts for the sake of those in need. All so that we might expand God's kingdom, conquering fear, indifference, and greed, with the abundance of God's love, compassion, and mercy. God never says that following Christ will be easy, yet God has fulfilled His promise to transform us and quench our spiritual thirst through the waters of Baptism. God continues to feed us with His Body and Blood in the Eucharistic feast, strengthening us for the work He has given us to do. Whenever we gather, we too join with the throng around God's altar singing praises to the Lamb, and offering our thanksgivings to the glory of God's name.

Amen.