

This morning's readings are so full and rich that it's difficult to know where to start. When that happens, I find it useful to look at the collect, the prayer for the day. "God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation, Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith." That sums up the readings pretty well doesn't it – in the Gospel reading we heard about one of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, what you might call the Paschal mystery in action; in the Acts reading we heard how the early disciples lived – sharing everything they had; and in the New Testament reading we heard about our inner walk of reconciliation with God.

In the Paschal mystery, reconciliation is the gift and the act of God. Reconciliation assumes that there is a disagreement – something that caused the need for reconciliation. In this case the dissention has been caused by sin and has caused sin. Humanity separated from God, and allowed its violence and hatred to continue that separation. You don't have to look very far to see examples of violence and hatred in society; and every day violence is glorified in movies and games. Americans are buying more guns than ever before. In 2020, there were 64% more guns bought than in 2019, and the trend continued into this year. When we are afraid, we try to protect ourselves.

Jesus did not protect himself. The crucifixion is the prime symbol of how the fear which grows out of our separation from God feeds the cycle of violence. I am reading a book right now which compares the lynching of Black people in America with the crucifixion. It is not a thing of the distant past – the crucifixion is with us today.

Since Christ is in all beings, whenever violence is perpetrated it is being perpetrated against Christ as well as against humans or other creatures or the planet itself. Yet the Paschal mystery is that God took that prime act of violence against Godself, God took the worst we could do, and made it a thing of beauty. Because God turned it on its head and made it the basis of reconciliation between God and humanity. The very apex of separation, God turned into reconciliation. Don't ask me how – it is a mystery my friends. The apostle Paul called it foolishness, and even today it seems foolish to say that a lynching tree could become, in the hands of God, the establishment of a new covenant.

But that is what we believe. That is what we commemorate and make our own when we celebrate the Great Thanksgiving, the Eucharist, the Covenant meal together. The one who was crucified is risen and his resurrection life now lives in us – his disciples and members of the household of faith. We have been reconciled with God and now we get to live that in our own lives. We prayed in the collect, "Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith."

The reading from the first letter of John talks about how we engage our reconciliation with God in our hearts. Let me read you that part again:

If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and

just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

That needs a little unpacking doesn't it? all those if...then clauses packed on top of one another... It may be helpful to start at the end, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." Humility is vital in the non-violent life that we are called to. We do sin as individuals, and as members of humanity we are implicated in the sin of our people. When we look deep into our hearts we find that we are violent, we harbor anger and criticism, we rejoice in the downfall of those we don't like. My friends, we have sinned. But when we acknowledge our sinfulness the one who is faithful and just will forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Isn't that an amazing promise?

God has already started the process of reconciliation. God has already provided the sacrifice that in ancient days was necessary for reconciliation. God has offered us the path into oneness with God – our part is to acknowledge that we need to be renewed and transformed, that on our own we cannot break the cycle, that on our own we cannot become the people God created us to be. I don't for a moment think that God expects us to dwell on how sinful we are; I think God wants us to get on with worshiping and serving God, not dwelling in self-recrimination. In fact, focusing on our sin is calling God a liar because as we just heard, "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

We come to the process of reconciliation as sinners needing forgiveness and cleansing. Which is God's free gift. And then we get to walk in the light. We read, "if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." Walking in the light. That's what it is all about.

But what does that mean in practice? What is walking in the light? I'm not sure – I think it is one of those things that we ask the Holy Spirit to help us do. It reminds me of what Jesus said when he was talking about himself as the vine and us as the branches: "abide in me, and I will abide in you." It is all metaphor because we can only talk about the unsayable in metaphor. But we have clues. We have clues from Scripture and we have clues from the lives and writings of the many, many people of God who have gone before us.

Walking in the light is walking as if it really is true that God loves us and has already reconciled us to God's self – walking as though we are becoming Christ-like beings- walking as if all our hatred and anger has been washed away and we are free.

And when we do that, when in our hearts we are walking in the light, it will as the collect says, "Show forth in our lives." But we don't get to wait. We get to share the love of God with others even as we are learning to walk in the light, because there is no difference. Just as the early church shared all their possessions, so we get to share ourselves and our wealth with others. Social justice is all about the distribution of resources and opportunity. When you are scared you need to hoard and keep things for yourself and your immediate family. When you are scared you perceive others as a threat.

And there is the basis of violence and hatred. Perceiving others as a threat. That's why the sales of guns have increased so dramatically. The combination of the pandemic and social unrest have made us afraid and we perceive threats around us.

But when you know the love of God flooding your heart, when you are walking in the light consciously practicing non-violent living, then you know that there is enough. You are experiencing reconciliation with God and you can share what you have so that there will be no lack. No lack for anyone. The reconciliation you experience with God becomes reconciliation with all humans, all beings.

You no longer need to prepare to fight. Because you are walking in the light and you know that God has already done it all. Life is God's gift.

Everything is grace.