

## **This is my Father's World**

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year B; April 28, 2024

Acts 10: 44-48; Psalm 98; 1 John 5: 1-6; John 15:9-17.

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*“All that borrows life from thee is ever in thy care, and everywhere that I could be, thou, God, art present there.”  
In the Name of God~ Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.*

Here in our part of the world, even when Easter Day is early as it was this year, our experience of the Resurrection is deeply connected with the arrival of spring. We have been formed to think this- the language of our Easter hymns describes the beauty of spring: bloom in every meadow, leaves on every bough, the brightness of the morning and days of lengthening light all praising their Creator and singing out their joy and gladness. All that has been dead or dormant in the darkness of winter's hibernation begins to blossom and is symbolic of the new

life that is ours as Easter people. Maybe it's because I am looking for it, but if I needed anything to convince me that new life is all around us and created by a power so much greater than myself I would find it in the flowering trees that have been so beautiful the last couple of weeks- I especially love the dogwoods in my neighborhood that are actually two completely different shades of pink- as if one color wasn't enough for them and so they thought they'd bloom in two different ways, just for the fun of it.

We have heard, during these Sundays of Eastertide, a series of readings meant to form us into a community based on the stories of the first followers of Jesus. We have heard the apostles proclaiming the truth of the Resurrection and that its life-changing truth is meant for all people, stories of proclaiming and healing and baptizing that are spreading the kingdom to the ends of the earth. We have been shown what love looks like when it is the love that can only be of God, a love that comes

from both the Father and the Son, teaching us the fullness of what it means to abide in this love and giving us a model for how we too can love like this. And we have been talking about longing- how it is the longing of individual, uniquely beloved people, such as our Ethiopian eunuch last week- transformed by the living Word and the power of the sacraments to make the good news come alive and calling us to actively share the love we ourselves have known, caring well for everything we have been given, all of God's creation. And we have heard- and will soon hear more of in the stories of Jesus' Ascension- that it is the gift of the Holy Spirit that will equip us for the work of bringing all this to fruition.

When I hear in today's Collect: *O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding*, it makes me wonder- what are those good things, and how does knowing them help us claim them and share them so we make God's

goodness more widely known? They are, of course, the guiding forces of our Christian belief: the living Word, the Holy Spirit falling upon all who hear it, the gift of baptism by water and the Spirit, commandments we can obey, the promise of abiding love and intimacy of relationship with God, the call to bear the fruit that will last and points always towards the true Vine and the Vinegrower. They are our natural and soul-deep responses of love, gratitude, joy, wonder- expressed in our worship and praise to God. *And they are the endless places of beauty and majesty in everything God has created and is still creating*- our respect for and delight in the world around us and our steadfast belief that all creation is called to rejoice and offer praise to its Creator.

“Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things”, says today’s psalm, psalm 98. “All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God...shout with joy to the Lord, all you lands; let the sea make a

noise and all that is in it...let the rivers clap their hands and the hills ring out with joy before the Lord.” In its original setting and use, this psalm triumphantly proclaimed God’s presence at a moment when the reality of defeat and exile had led many among God’s people to conclude that God was absent, faraway, no longer acting on their behalf. I know that sometimes it is tempting for us to feel the same way- how can God possibly be present in the lack of love, the utter disregard and even cruelty we hear of not only towards our fellow humans but all of God’s creation. And so it becomes all the more urgent that we proclaim boldly how the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is transforming God’s people in every age to sing the power of God at work doing greater things than we can see or imagine- breathing new life and righteousness and sacred harmony into the universe since the moment of creation and calling us to do the same.

On this Rogation Sunday- this day when we ask God's blessings on all creation and our own mindful tending of the abundance we have been given- I chose hymns that I hope will be meaningful for you. I chose them because their texts sing with the beauty of our world and our longing for God to be present with us everywhere, in our praising and in our labor and in our rest at the end of the day. I want us to sing of the almighty power of God that made the mountains, the seas, and the skies; that "vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth, our island home" that we also pray for in our Eucharistic Prayer. I want us to sing of how the goodness of the Lord filled the earth with food; of how God formed all creatures with his Word and then pronounced them good- of all the wonders we cannot help but see everywhere we look. I want us to sing, as we will in our offertory hymn: "This is my Father's World: O let me ne'er forget that through the wrong seems oft so strong God is the Ruler

yet. This is my Father's World: Why should my heart be sad? The Lord is King, let heavens ring! God reigns, let earth be glad." And I want to send us out with "Come, labor on. Who dares stand idle on the harvest plain, while all around us waves the golden grain? Claim the high calling angels cannot share- *to young and old the Gospel gladness bear.*"

Somewhere in my readings about Rogationtide I stumbled across the phrase "holy neighborliness"- that the gathering of God's people to honor the spirit of Rogation is not just about seeds or soil or asking for God's blessings on the labor that tends our common life, but about the deeper realization that we are completely connected to each other and all things, not only in the physical realm but also- especially-in the spiritual. Rogation is about experiencing and sharing the kind of love that grows best in community- about shaping the kind of world where because we treat each other with

abiding and steadfast love, caring lovingly for the rest of God's creation would surely follow. The healing our world needs is rooted in our call to proclaim the Resurrection as alive and true in not only our lives but in the world around us, all that is life and health and beauty and wholeness eternally new and witnessing to the power of this story. After all: ***“This is my Father’s world: he shines in all that’s fair; In the rustling grass I hear him pass, he speaks to me everywhere.”*** Amen.