

“God, what is taking you so long?”

April 4, 2010,

EASTER SUNDAY

Text: Isaiah 65:17-25, John 20:1-18

I.

We're an impatient people, aren't we? I mean, we don't much like waiting—for anything. In our consumer-driven culture, we're acculturated to *want what we want NOW*.

We get impatient as people of faith, too, don't we? How can we not?

Impatience is certainly not a virtue, but what are we to do? We get tired and wearied by unevenness in life, the glaring disparities between those who have and those who do not ... what theologians call *the lingering disproportion*.

We hate injustice of all kinds. The natural disasters in Haiti and Chile bring us to our knees with compassion. The poverty in the Third World, and even right here in the United States ... even right here in Miami-Dade County weighs on our soul.

And the mindless violence that rises up now and then numbs our spirit. The young football player from FIU who was stabbed to death here recently comes to mind. Over 1,400 attended the Memorial service for him. A vibrant, young life just snuffed out ... like that, in an instant.

All of this makes us impatient; impatient for a re-ordering of the world, for the dawning of a new day. Impatient for a break-through leading to a new awareness of the sanctity of life, to a new awakening of God's presence and God's purposes in the world and in the life of every human being.

We get impatient for a better world ... for God's passion for peace with justice to break through and become a reality. We get impatient, don't we?

And at times, we wonder: ***Where IS God?*** And more, still: ***God, what's taking you so long?***

II.

That must have been Peter's question, again and again. As Jesus' most outspoken and impulsive disciple, he couldn't bear to see the way Jesus was treated in his final days.

Peter may well have been caught off guard by it all—the blatant injustice and demeaning of Jesus; this utterly good man, this wise and compassionate human being in whom God seemed to be so alive. How could they be treating him like this? And at the end, in the

courtyard of the high priest, Peter had himself lost all courage and had faltered horribly. And as the gospels writers note, *he went away and wept bitterly*.

Why wasn't there some reckoning? Some straightening out of things?

Where are you, God? What's taking you so long?

For his part, Judas must have wondered the same thing. Most likely, he was a zealot, an activist. He loathed the Roman occupation of Israel along with all the injustices forced upon his people. And he had wanted so much for Jesus to be *the one* ... the *one* to liberate Israel of the despised Romans. But it wasn't happening. And Judas and his cohorts were getting impatient.

And so, hoping to prompt Jesus' hand in all of this (that Jesus might reveal, what Judas assumed to be, his *Messianic powers*), Judas was driven to an awful betrayal.

Again, ***What's going on Jesus? What's taking you so long?***

III.

Our reading from Isaiah 65—the prophet known as **Third Isaiah**—is in many ways a response to our theological impatience. It bubbles over with transformative good news. God is spelling out a new vision for the days ahead.

Third Isaiah's prophetic activity was during the historical period known as the **Restoration**, the time, after the Babylonian Exile, when those Israelites who wanted to, were allowed to Jerusalem and to the land of Judah.

It was a time fraught with many challenges because everything had changed. After all, more than fifty years had passed. But now, the Spirit was on the move, a new prophetic voice had risen up and a new future was breaking through:

For I am about to create a new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. ...for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.

I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.

And then the prophet starts laying out the details of this new vision: A new day is bursting forth, a day brimming with hope and possibility; a day when all of God's people will live together in beautiful harmony.

Talk about a response to impatience, hear this:

Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear.

How great would it be to have such reassurance of God's presence in our lives? To have a real sense that we are *that* tied to God, and God to us? O what a day!

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together ...and they shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord. What graphic words of hope!

IV.

This poetry of protest from Isaiah reminds us of God's relentless vision of *shalom*. God wants so desperately for the fruits of God's creation—all of God's children—to be alive to God's promises: to have a sense of hope and reassurance about tomorrow, to know in our hearts and spirits that we are loved; and, mostly, that LOVE is what our lives are to be about.

That's what EASTER celebrates: that **love** is more powerful than death ... and more powerful than cynicism and all the negative forces that are out there trying to bring us down. The point is that LOVE is alive and well—the primary force of God in the world—and it's in each of us; if only we can see it. It's in every human being, no matter anything about us.

But we have to look for it ... and uncover it ... and learn to see it, so it is not invisible to us.

This reminds me of the bumper sticker that said, **Start seeing motorcycles**. I can understand the impetus for the sticker ... because, much of the time, I *don't see motorcycles*. They're there, no doubt. But I don't see them. Do you? So often they're invisible to me.

Again and again in the gospel stories, Jesus tries to talk to his disciples about his death and his resurrection. But it's too soon, of course, and they don't get it. He wants to say to them, **Start seeing the resurrection** ... *start seeing the power of God's truth, the magnificence of God's love. It's all about you. In fact, it burns in the heart of every human person.*

That's because we human beings thrive on being loved. We're drawn to the way love makes us feel—the closeness, the sense of affirmation ... and then the joy.

This is what was happening on Easter morning when some of Jesus' followers go to the tomb and discover Jesus isn't there. And in trying to understand what has happened, what they discover isn't DEATH but a living presence.

Later, when Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb, she experiences it, too—the **living presence**—but by then, she's looking for it because the tomb is empty. And then she shares all of this with the other disciples ... and soon, they, too, experience it—the living PRESENCE—why? Because, now, they, too, are looking for it.

That's the key. We have to look for it.

Perhaps my sermon title should have been, not—*God, what's taking you so long?*—but something more like, *people, what's taking US so long?*

Hello! Look around you. Start seeing the resurrection. Start seeing the living presence. It's there and we are the keys to seeing it and understanding it and sharing it with the world.

Easter, friends, is the renewed awareness that our lives are all about the LOVE, the sense of this LIVING PRESENCE that throbs in the heart of each one of us. But to experience it, we have to look for it. That's *our* part—looking for it, seeing it, and then acting on it.

But we get impatient, don't we?

V.

Erasmus, the famous Renaissance scholar, told a classic story one time that sheds light on the importance of each of us doing our part in helping God realize God's purposes.

In the story, Jesus returns to heaven after his time on earth. The angels quickly gather around him, eager to hear about his earthly experience. Patiently, Jesus tells them about the way God was alive in his life, about how he could feel the Spirit in him ... about how he was able to do great things that many people called miracles and impart great truths of God's wisdom to people. He explained to them, too, about his last days and about his pain and despair on the cross; and then, too, about his resurrection.

When he had finally finished filling them in, Michael the Archangel asks Jesus, **But what happens now?**

Jesus says to him, *I have left behind some disciples and a handful of men and women who have faithfully followed me and supported me. They will declare my message and talk to people about God's ways and God's LOVE. These faithful ones will build my church.*

Right away, Michael responds, **but what if these people fail? What is your backup plan?**

To which Jesus replies, *There is no backup plan.*

VI.

Friends, that's it! It's up to you and me to catch the spirit, sense the vision and share the LOVE. That's our part.

It's Easter. Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb with the pain of absence tearing at her heart. The tomb is empty and the absence deepens. But not for long.

Soon the presence of Jesus engulfs here and, although there's no way she can fully understand it, her life is filled, now—not with absence, but with presence. The essence of the one she had been grieving is now thriving in her soul.

For Mary, what she had experienced to be an ending, is in fact a beginning. She's seen resurrection, first hand.

Still, the question lingers for us: **what's taking us so long?** So long to see the LOVE that is all about us? The LOVE that understands and values our differences but that commands us, yet, to take care of one another and to be messengers of God's love.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

All praise be unto God! Amen!

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*
6701 Miami Lakeway South
Miami Lakes, FL 33014
On the web at www.mlchurch.com