

4.19.20 Er2 Blessed Belief [John 20:19-31]

- Let me tell you two stories
 - The first story took place long ago in 1755 in Lisbon, Portugal
 - It was a Saturday morning, when suddenly the earth shook and huge fissures opened up in the ground
 - The water of the ocean drew back from the shore grounding all the ships in the bay, and then a massive tsunami surged back in and inundated downtown Lisbon
 - After the waters receded, fires broke out in the unflooded areas, and when the day was done, an estimated 30-40,000 people had died
 - That day is STILL known as the Great Lisbon Earthquake, and ironically it happened on All Saints' Day, a Holy Day, while the churches were filled with worshipers, where many of the faithful died
 - It's an awful story
 - The second story is a not quite so depressing, but it is sad too in its own way
 - We get bored of staying in the house during this time of coronavirus isolation, so probably like you, and like many of our neighbors, we take frequent walks outside
 - During Holy Week, we bumped into someone we knew, and while standing over six feet away and chatting, she told us that she had been to church with her aunt
 - Now her Aunt Fern is pushing 90, and I know that she is a feisty woman
 - But this neighbor told us that her Aunt Fern kept saying after church, "God must be really angry at us to send this coronavirus!"
- So what do these stories – the story of the great Lisbon Earthquake and the story of Aunt Fern have in common?
- ... Both stories are about a very troubled faith
 - The tragedy of the Lisbon earthquake was so terrible, that in its aftermath a whole school of thought arose, that decided that because a loving God surely would not have

caused or even permitted the death of so many people especially when the churches were packed with people, then God must have decided not to intervene... God must have created the world and stepped back and allowed it to run on its own... God just must have taken a hands off approach to everything and everyone in the world

- In other words, God had made the world, and simply walked away
- The story about Aunt Fern has a different outcome.
 - She believes that God has intervened directly in the world, and that intervention has been angry and cruel by sending coronavirus
 - Fern feels that God is judgmental, God is vengeful, and God is punishing sin
- But both the image of the disengaged God, and the very engaged but angry God either reject or forget the whole Easter story
 - Now neither the folks after the Lisbon Earthquake nor Aunt Fern are the first people to reject or ignore the Good News of the death and resurrection of Christ
 - After all, today's gospel reading tells the story of Thomas, one of the disciples who followed Jesus throughout his ministry
 - Thomas was a close companion of Jesus, but when the other disciples told Thomas who had not been there with them that Jesus had appeared to them in a locked room of all places, Thomas did not believe
 - And who could blame him?
 - People do not rise from the dead very often, do they?
 - But Thomas had forgotten what he had seen and heard throughout Jesus' ministry – namely that Jesus of Nazareth was the Lord of life
 - Then a week later, the disciples gathered once again in a locked room, but this time Thomas was with them.
 - Jesus appeared to them, and this time Thomas saw Jesus and believed
 - Now this story ends in a unique way – *this story ends with the gospel of John not telling the story, but by addressing us the readers and the listeners of the gospel*

in this day: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

- Good Friday and Easter is about God entering into and changing the world in a whole different way than what the world and its people expect
 - Jesus Christ died on the cross to open his arms to sinners, and to take our sin and brokenness to the grave and leave it there
 - Christ rose from the dead not just so that HE could live, but so that HE could give and share with US the gift of life
 - And the Gospel of John tell us that our job, the job of Christians, the mission of the church, is to tell people who do not believe in the crucified and risen Christ that God has indeed entered into and changed the world, AND the job of Christians and the mission of the church is to remind believers (sometimes including even ourselves) that Christ died to forgive sinners and to bring life
 - Even coronavirus will not endure, so let us never forget that John says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” – and so we have been called to share the hope-filled belief rooted in God’s love shown to the world in Good Friday and Easter, a hope-filled belief that will ALWAYS have the last word