

Getting Accustomed to Victory

"I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. —John 21:3

John's Gospel tells us more than any other of the days which followed the Resurrection, and surprisingly, much of what is reported is the very definition of anticlimax! The greatest victory of all of time has just been won by the rising of Jesus Christ from the dead, and in the days after we find the apostles, bored, aimless and restless. Peter decides to go fishing. It was something he understood and it would keep him active for at least a while. At such a momentous time it seems a silly proposal, but he and his fellow disciples realize that it was better than doing nothing and so they ventured out. The reader cannot help but wonder if this story had taken a wrong turn, for why would these apostles look so lost and confused at such a time of triumph? But our ways are not God's ways, and there was indeed a plan for these servants of God, and that plan was taking shape, even in the quiet and seemingly aimless moments.

The next great miracle was to happen at Pentecost, some fifty days off, and what was to be done during that pause? It appears that the first order of business was for the apostles to get some rest, and this seems a most sensible plan. The days and weeks leading up to Easter, and for that matter the last three years of itinerate ministry, had been exhausting and eventually traumatic! These men and their families needed to **rest**. Such rest takes time and we are not good at dealing with these kinds of Sabbaths. Once the troops become restless, as they appeared to be, we think of the rest time as being over, but such is not the case. Their bodies, souls and spirits required extended stillness both to recover from eventful days and to prepare for what was ahead.

This was also a time to **reorient**. They were still the apostles of Jesus Christ, but now their calling led them to a whole new kind of ministry. Their Master would soon be leaving them to the care of the Holy Spirit. The world would soon be looking to them and there was a Church to be built! Now was the time for some final face-to-face training with their risen Lord (we know how the fishing trip ended) and this too required some time off. Doubts needed to be addressed, a leader needed to be restored and a replacement had to be named. This and much more needed to be done.

Now was a time to be **readied to live the victory** which Christ had won. In a dark, sad world all heaven was about to break loose and the apostles were to be leading the charge. There was so much to be done, so for now these weary souls needed to rest.

We are now into the second year of this great pandemic. This ordeal lasted longer than most had anticipated, but finally we see the victory! The vaccine has found its way into the arms of most of our vulnerable people and those over sixty-five. The numbers of infections and deaths has significantly diminished. Perhaps we shall never be allowed to say that this pandemic is truly over, for there are those whose delicate health calls for an ongoing hyper-vigilance, and some will continue to follow and monitor COVID's residual a long time to come. But all told, the giant has fallen and its days are numbered.

One might have thought that the end of such an ordeal would result in spontaneous celebrations, but the reality of it all is more like the post-Easter days of the apostles. We are tired from a long year, victorious, and yet uncertain. Like the apostles, we await further instructions. Now we look for the Lord to lead us into this victory and hope. No longer shall we be hunkering down. The exiles are returning and the once sheltered Church is now emerging! Like those exiles who returned to the Promised Land from Babylon we find that the return has its challenges and even dangers. We feel hesitant. It is time to get re-acquainted with victory!

As we move toward a reactivated Church, I will no longer be sending out twice weekly *Thoughts for the Hunkered Down*, but will instead be publishing weekly *Words for the Emerging Church*. Stepping out into victory is a strange and even frightening feeling, but this is a great problem to have! Let us walk together as our victorious Lord leads us.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them."

The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb.

May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves. —Psalm 126

May God Almighty direct our days in his peace, and grant us the gifts of his blessing; may he deliver us in all our troubles, and establish our minds in the tranquility of this peace; may he so guide us through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal. —Gregorian Sacramentary, 6th century