

Unless

John 20:24-29

A ceasefire. That's what they call it . . . when two warring sides agree to stop killing each other . . . for a time.

A ceasefire. Let's give thanks that's what the United States and Iran have agreed to . . . to stop killing each other . . . for a time. Let's give thanks, even if it's for the selfish reason of petrol prices coming down. Let's give thanks for a respite from war . . . as brief as it may be. For that's all a ceasefire is . . . a respite. And, elsewhere the killing goes on . . . the damaging of humans . . . the damaging of the earth . . . the extinction of species . . . I don't think that's what God had in mind when he gave dominion of the earth to human beings!

Earlier this week, when the Artemis spacecraft emerged from behind the moon and communications were re-established with mission control, one of the astronauts had a heart-warming, poignant message for her fellow human beings back on earth. She said, "We will explore . . . we will build . . . we will visit again . . . we will inspire, but ultimately we will always choose earth. We will always choose each other."

Now, call me a doubting Thomas if you will . . . and I'm as partial to an inspirational message as the next person . . . but I want to say to those astronauts: "Show me the proof . . . show me the proof we will always choose earth . . . show me the proof we will always choose each other"! Because from my vantage point, I see human beings exploiting the earth and damaging the earth. And, given the opportunity to be in control . . . to have a choice . . . I will always choose *me* . . . and you will always choose *you*! And, that's why a ceasefire is as much as we can hope for when human beings become lords . . . when human beings are given power! It doesn't matter if it's political rulers, or economic rulers, or religious rulers, we will not be our brother's keeper!

So, let us give thanks for the small mercies of a ceasefire . . . any ceasefire . . . but, a ceasefire only puts off death for so long, eventually that's where we end up when we are lords of the world. Even if I could move to a desert island . . . even if I *could* be the master of my own destiny, still death would have the last say about my little kingdom.

So, I suspect God would also be a little skeptical about that astronaut's fine-sounding words . . . God knows us too well! Which is why he sent Jesus. He sent Jesus to settle the matter of lordship once and for all. And Jesus came with a different narrative. His wasn't a narrative of retribution, or destruction, or hellfire and brimstone. His wasn't a narrative of strength and power and control. His was a narrative of servanthood, and humility. He talked of love and grace and mercy and forgiveness. He said, "Turn the other cheek . . . love your enemies . . . do good to those who hate you". And, he didn't just say it, he did it! He did it! This is how he showed his lordship! Every other lordship leads to death but Jesus promised his way would lead to life. He promised his lordship would give life . . . even in this world of death.

That's what the disciples heard him say. That's what the disciples saw him do: give life. Healing. Restoring. Forgiving. Blessing. Wherever he went. That's what Thomas saw and heard. Always Jesus' promises: follow

me and you will live. And, perhaps, slowly but surely, as Thomas followed Jesus around, he began to believe . . . that this man whom the religious authorities accused of blasphemy . . . this man who refused to use his power to control others, this man who didn't have a selfish bone in his body . . . this man who embodied servanthood and humility . . . Thomas started to dare believe that the way this man lived really *could* give life.

Which is why it was so important when faced with talk of resurrection . . . this is why it was so important for Thomas to have proof. Thomas has been given a raw deal over the centuries, but this is no small matter of intellectual doubt Thomas is expressing. This is a serious matter of life and death for Thomas. What he wanted was not proof of *a* resurrection . . . not proof that resurrection is possible . . . what he wanted was proof of this *particular* resurrection . . . the resurrection of this *particular* person . . . this person who had defied all the worldly conventions of power and might . . . this person who promised life . . . eternal life . . . not just to the righteous, but to the lost sheep of Israel . . . to the tax collectors and prostitutes . . . and to the doubters! Thomas desperately needed to know if this man standing in front of him was the same Jesus who only a week or so previously had been nailed to a Roman cross . . . because that . . . that way of dying, threw everything into doubt, both logically and theologically! Can a crucified man really be the lord of life . . . and not just life in general, but Thomas's life?!

And, more than that, if this wasn't the same man standing in front of him who had been on the cross . . . or even if it was a perfected version of that man, it meant that God had rejected Jesus' way. It meant the religious leaders were right to crucify a forgiving messiah. It meant that God was on the side of the righteous not the sinner. It meant that God prioritized the perfect over the flawed. It meant that God valued merit over mercy. It meant that the best Thomas could ever hope for in life was a ceasefire. If this wasn't the same Jesus.

So, when Thomas finally comes face to face with Jesus, without being asked, Jesus shows Thomas his scars . . . as if to show that this is what defines his lordship. The very same man who was crucified is standing in front of Thomas . . . with the scars to prove it . . . the scars to prove God says YES to Jesus' way . . . to Jesus' way of life. The scarred human being standing before him *is* the Lord of life! And, the Lord of life speaks to Thomas and says: "Peace be with you"!

Peace. Not a ceasefire, but peace. Peace with God. An end to hostilities. Forever. Not peace because an agreement has been signed. Not because demands have been met. Not because strength has won the day. Peace because the Lord of life has risen from the dead. Peace because God *chooses* Thomas . . . even with his doubts. Peace because God chooses the world. Peace because God chooses sinners. Peace because God chooses the weak and the flawed and the undeserving . . . God chooses to give them life.

As God has chosen us. Are we not those who have been blessed by not seeing and yet believing? Peace with God means there is always more life to live. And, so we are sent out as those first disciples were . . . sent as the Father sent Jesus. Not to be the perfect human beings, but to be the flawed, but forgiven human beings we are. Sent not with our scars airbrushed away, but with an openness to reveal our weaknesses, our questions, our uncertainties. Sent believing Jesus' way of humility and service is the way of life . . . *our* way of life.

So we go to heal rather than hurt, to restore rather than ruin, to repair rather than wreck, to forgive rather than threaten, and in doing so we proclaim the Lord of life . . . the Lord who gives life. And we go knowing that we human beings may not always choose each other, but God will always choose us!

Peace be with you.

Amen.

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