

"THE EASTER CRISIS OF 2020"

**A SERMON BASED ON THE NEW TESTAMENT
RECORDING OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
ACTS 2:14a, 36-41) AND PRESENTED FOR
ORLEAN UMC ON APRIL 19, 2020-----**

EASTER WAS A CRISIS.

**EXACTLY 100 YEARS AGO, DENMARK
EXPERIENCED THE EASTER CRISIS OF 1920.....
THE KING AND THE CABINET HAD A CONFLICT
THAT ESCALATED INTO A CONSTITUTIONAL
CRISIS, LEADING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A
CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY IN DENMARK.**

EASTER WAS ALSO A *RISING*..... IN IRELAND, THE EASTER RISING OF 1916 WAS A BLOODY MILESTONE IN THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE IRISH AND THE BRITISH. BEGINNING ON EASTER MONDAY, THOUSANDS OF IRISH MEN AND WOMEN SEIZED LOCATIONS IN DUBLIN AND PROCLAIMED AN IRISH REPUBLIC. THE BRITISH ARMY RESPONDED WITH FORCE, LEADING TO FIERCE STREET FIGHTING AND HEAVY CASUALTIES. ALMOST 500 PEOPLE DIED, AND 2,600 WERE WOUNDED.

AFTER SIX DAYS, THE BRITISH ARMY SUPPRESSED THE EASTER RISING. THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WERE TAKEN PRISONER, AND MOST LEADERS OF THE MOVEMENT WERE EXECUTED.

BUT BRITAIN'S REACTION TO THE EASTER RISING WAS NOT POPULAR..... PUBLIC OPINION BEGAN TO SHIFT, AND THE RESULT WAS THAT IRELAND MOVED STEADILY TOWARD INDEPENDENCE.

ON THE CENTENNIAL OF THE EASTER RISING, NETFLIX OFFERED A MINI-SERIES CALLED *REBELLION*, A DRAMA IN WHICH "LOVER IS PITTED AGAINST LOVER, FRIEND AGAINST FRIEND, AND BROTHER AGAINST BROTHER." ONE OF THE CREATORS OF THE SERIES SAID THAT "*THERE WAS A HUGE APPETITE FOR PEOPLE WANTING TO LEARN MORE.*"

**SO EASTER WAS BOTH A RISING AND A CRISIS.
BUT NOT EVERYONE TODAY KNOWS ABOUT THE
EASTER RISING OF 1916, AND VERY FEW PEOPLE
HAVE HEARD OF THE EASTER CRISIS OF 1920.
MUCH BETTER KNOWN IS THE EASTER RISING
AND CRISIS OF THE FIRST CENTURY, EVENTS
THAT HAPPENED IN JERUSALEM..... THIS RISING
WAS FAR MORE PEACEFUL AND FULL OF
GENUINE NEW LIFE, AS OPPOSED TO ARMED
REBELLION..... AND THIS CRISIS DID NOT LEAD
TO A NEW FORM OF GOVERNMENT, BUT INSTEAD
TO A POWERFUL NEW FAITH.**

**THE RISING AND THE CRISIS WORKED
TOGETHER TO LAUNCH A MOVEMENT AND
CHANGE THE WORLD. AND RIGHT UP TO THE
PRESENT DAY, THERE IS “A HUGE APPETITE FOR
PEOPLE WANTING TO LEARN MORE.”
SO, WHAT IS THE CRISIS FOR US TODAY? THE
EASTER CRISIS OF 2020?-----**

**ONE OBVIOUS ANSWER IS MOST CERTAINLY THE
WORLD-WIDE PANDEMIC CALLED CORONAVIRUS
19 OR COVID-19 FOR SHORT.....NO RESPECTOR
OF WEALTH OR PEDIGREE----THIS VIRUS
ATTACKS ALL IN ITS PATH....**

**IF ONE IS INTO NUMBERS....AS OF WEDNESDAY
APRIL 15, 2020 WHEN I AM DOING THIS
RESEARCH....THERE HAVE BEEN OVER TWO
MILLION REPORTED COVID-19 CASES WORLD-
WIDE WITH OVER 131 THOUSAND DEATHS.....**

**THE UNITED STATES LEADS THE WORLD WITH
OVER 614 THOUSAND CASES AND NEARLY
THIRTY THOUSAND HAVE DIED**

**IN OUR OWN COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA WE
HAVE HAD 6,500 REPORTED CASES AND 195 OF
OUR FELLOW CITIZENS HAVE DIED**

**BUT ALL OF THIS IS FAR MORE THAT A GRIM
LEDGER OF NUMBERS.....REMEMBER THAT
EVERY ONE OF THESE NUMBERS WAS A
FACE....WAS A REAL HUMAN BEING-----
PROBABLY WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND
MOST LIKELY HAS LEFT MANY MOURNING AND
GRIEVING AT THEIR LOSS...SADNESS AND
DESPAIR AT THEIR PASSING**

**IN MY MIND-----IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO THINK OF
ANY OTHER CRISIS ANYWHERE NEAR THIS
MAGNITUDE AT EASTER 2020.....THIS IS THE
EASTER CRISIS OF 2020**

**BUT THERE ALSO ARE OTHER EASTER CRISES
FOR US TO CONSIDER THIS MORNING.....**

FIRST, THERE IS THE EASTER RISING-----

**STANDING IN THE STREETS OF JERUSALEM, THE
APOSTLE PETER RAISED HIS VOICE AND BOLDLY
ADDRESSED THE PEOPLE OF JERUSALEM.**

ONE NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLAR WRITES:

**“PETER’S SPEECH IS THE FIRST PUBLIC
DISCLOSURE OF JESUS’ RESURRECTION..... THIS
MESSAGE IS A SHOCK TO THE INHABITANTS OF
JERUSALEM.”**

YES, A SHOCK. THE RISING IS A SHOCK.

**PETER SPOKE ABOUT “JESUS OF NAZARETH”
AND ACCUSED THE ISRAELITES OF CRUCIFYING
AND KILLING HIM. “BUT GOD RAISED HIM UP,” HE
SAID, “HAVING FREED HIM FROM DEATH,
BECAUSE IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO BE
HELD IN ITS POWER” (VV. 22-24).**

**THE RESURRECTION WAS A REBELLION — A
SUCCESSFUL REVOLT AGAINST THE
OPPRESSIVE POWER OF DEATH. “THIS JESUS
GOD RAISED UP,” PROCLAIMED PETER, “AND OF
THAT ALL OF US ARE WITNESSES” (V. 32). AND
HAVING CONQUERED DEATH, JESUS NOW SITS
ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD IN HEAVEN.**

**“THEREFORE LET THE ENTIRE HOUSE OF ISRAEL
KNOW WITH CERTAINTY THAT GOD HAS MADE
HIM BOTH LORD AND MESSIAH, THIS JESUS
WHOM YOU CRUCIFIED” (V. 36).**

**LIKE THE BRITISH ARMY IN DUBLIN, THE POWER
PEOPLE IN JERUSALEM THOUGHT THEY HAD
CRUSHED THE REBELLION..... JESUS WAS
KILLED ON A CROSS AND LAID IN A TOMB.....
BUT GOD RAISED JESUS FROM THE DEAD, AND
PUBLIC OPINION BEGAN TO SHIFT.....**

**MORE AND MORE PEOPLE WERE SEEING THAT
JESUS HAD CONQUERED DEATH AND BEEN
MADE BOTH LORD AND MESSIAH.**

- . *THE RISING WAS A LIBERATION MOVEMENT
IN WHICH GOD FREED JESUS FROM DEATH.***
- . *THE RISING WAS A REVOLUTION IN WHICH A
CRUCIFIED CRIMINAL BECAME LORD AND
MESSIAH.***
- . *THE RISING WAS A GRASSROOTS
REBELLION IN WHICH A MAN FROM
NAZARETH BECAME THE RIGHT-HAND MAN
OF GOD.***

- . *THE RISING WAS A PROMISE OF FREEDOM FOR EVERYONE WHO FOLLOWS JESUS — FREEDOM FROM SIN, FREEDOM FROM OPPRESSION, FREEDOM FROM DEATH ITSELF.***
- . *THE RISING WAS A FIRST STEP TOWARD THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ENTIRE WORLD: ONE IN WHICH SUFFERING IS REPLACED BY JOY, INJUSTICE IS REPLACED BY JUSTICE, VIOLENCE IS REPLACED BY PEACE, DISCORD IS REPLACED BY HARMONY, AND DEATH IS REPLACED BY EVERLASTING LIFE.***

YES, THE EASTER RISING DOES ALL THESE THINGS, AND IN THE PROCESS IT SHAKES UP THE ESTABLISHED ORDER. THE RISING CREATES A CRISIS.

SECONDLY, THERE IS THE EASTER CRISIS..... THE BOOK OF ACTS TELLS US THAT WHEN THE PEOPLE OF JERUSALEM HEARD THE WORDS OF PETER, THEY WERE “CUT TO THE HEART” (V. 37). THE WORDS OF PETER CREATED A CRISIS FOR THEM, THROWING THEM INTO A TIME OF INTENSE DIFFICULTY AND TROUBLE.....

AS THEY FACED THIS CRISIS, THEY KNEW THAT THEY HAD TO MAKE AN IMPORTANT DECISION — IN FACT, THE GREEK WORK *KRISIS* MEANS “DECISION.” THEY ASKED PETER AND THE APOSTLES, “BROTHERS, WHAT SHOULD WE DO?” (V. 37).

PETER HAD AN IMMEDIATE RESPONSE FOR THEM, “REPENT, AND BE BAPTIZED EVERY ONE OF YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST SO THAT YOUR SINS MAY BE FORGIVEN; AND YOU WILL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT” (V. 38).

HE CHALLENGED THEM TO REPENT, WHICH MEANS TO MAKE A COMPLETE REVERSAL OF COURSE AND MOVE IN A NEW DIRECTION.

- . IF YOU HAVE BEEN OPPOSING JESUS, BEGIN TO SUPPORT HIM.***
- . IF YOU HAVE BEEN THE LORD OF YOUR OWN LIFE, BEGIN TO LIVE FOR A NEW LORD.***
- . IF YOU HAVE BEEN SERVING AN EARTHLY RULER, BEGIN TO SERVE A HEAVENLY MESSIAH.***
- . IF YOU HAVE BEEN PUTTING FAITH IN YOURSELF AND YOUR OWN ABILITIES, BEGIN TO PUT FAITH IN JESUS AND HIS POWER.***

**AFTER YOU REPENT, SAID PETER, THEN BE
BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST. THIS
SACRAMENT GIVES YOU FORGIVENESS OF SINS
AND THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.....**

**ONCE CLEANSED OF YOUR SINS, YOU GO
FORWARD KNOWING THAT YOU WILL NEVER
WALK ALONE, BUT THAT THE PRESENCE OF
GOD, IN THE FORM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WILL
ALWAYS BE WITH YOU.**

THE EASTER RISING CREATED AN EASTER CRISIS, ONE THAT FORCED THE PEOPLE OF JERUSALEM TO DECIDE WHETHER THEY WERE GOING TO OPPOSE JESUS OR SUPPORT HIM, WHETHER THEY WERE GOING TO SERVE AN EARTHLY KING OR A HEAVENLY MESSIAH. THE SITUATION WAS UNSTABLE, AND THEY KNEW THEY HAD TO CHOOSE.

BUT PETER ENCOURAGED THEM TO MAKE A DECISION FOR JESUS, SAYING THAT “THE PROMISE IS FOR YOU, FOR YOUR CHILDREN, AND FOR ALL WHO ARE FAR AWAY, EVERYONE WHOM THE LORD OUR GOD CALLS TO HIM” (V. 39).

WANTING THEM TO MOVE IN A NEW AND LIFE-GIVING DIRECTION, HE CONCLUDED WITH THE WORDS, “SAVE YOURSELVES FROM THIS CORRUPT GENERATION” (V. 40).

YES, THE EASTER CRISIS WAS A TURNING POINT, ONE THAT HAD ENORMOUS CONSEQUENCES FOR THE PEOPLE OF JERUSALEM.

THE CHOICE WAS BIGGER THAN ANY CRISIS POINTS IN U.S. HISTORY, TIMES IN WHICH PEOPLE HAD TO CHOOSE..... THE BOSTON TEA PARTY..... THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE..... THE ABOLITION MOVEMENT... THE CIVIL WAR..... THE FIRST WORLD WAR.....

**THE NEW DEAL..... THE SECOND WORLD WAR.....
THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT..... THE
ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT---TO NAME JUST A
FEW.....**

**ALL HAVE BEEN TURNING POINTS. SHOCKS TO
THE SYSTEM. TIMES OF DECISION. CRISIS
POINTS.**

**BUT THEY ARE NO BIGGER THAN THE QUESTION
RAISED BY THE BOOK OF ACTS: WHAT WOULD
THE PEOPLE OF JERUSALEM CHOOSE?**

**ACTS TELLS US THAT THOSE WHO WELCOMED
PETER'S MESSAGE "WERE BAPTIZED, AND THAT
DAY ABOUT 3,000 PERSONS WERE ADDED" (V.
41).**

THREE THOUSAND NEW CHRISTIANS! AN UNEXPECTED AND TRULY STUNNING RESPONSE. AND THEN WE LEARN THAT THEY “DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES’ TEACHING AND FELLOWSHIP, TO THE BREAKING OF BREAD AND THE PRAYERS” (V. 42).

AS WITH THE NETFLIX SERIES *REBELLION*, “THERE WAS A HUGE APPETITE FOR PEOPLE WANTING TO LEARN MORE.”

THE EASTER CRISIS LED TO THE RAPID GROWTH OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, FROM A HANDFUL OF APOSTLES TO A CROWD OF NEWLY BAPTIZED CHRISTIANS.....

**BUT INSTEAD OF CREATING CHAOS, THIS
EXPLOSIVE GROWTH WAS QUICKLY ORGANIZED
BY TEACHING, FELLOWSHIP, BREAKING OF
BREAD, AND PRAYERS.**

**THIS STORY FROM ACTS REMINDS US THAT THE
DAYS AFTER THE EASTER RISING WERE NOT
JUST A HAPPY TIME IN WHICH THE FOLLOWERS
OF JESUS GAVE THANKS FOR THE GIFT OF THE
RESURRECTION..... NO, THE RISING CREATED A
CRISIS, AND THE CHURCH RESPONDED BY
ORGANIZING ITSELF TO CONTINUE THE MINISTRY
AND MISSION OF JESUS IN THE WORLD.**

WE CAN DO THE SAME, AS WE ADOPT A CRISIS MENTALITY AND MAKE A FAITHFUL RESPONSE TO WHAT GOD IS DOING IN THE WORLD. OUR FOCUS SHOULD BE:

- **THE APOSTLES' TEACHING, SUCH AS THE WORDS OF PETER: "GOD HAS MADE [JESUS] BOTH LORD AND MESSIAH" (V. 36). JESUS REMAINS THE ONE LEADER WHO BOTH DESERVES AND REWARDS OUR DEEPEST ALLEGIANCE.**
- **FELLOWSHIP, WHICH IN GREEK IS *KOINONIA*. WITHIN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, FELLOWSHIP MEANS SHARING, CONTRIBUTION AND SPIRITUAL COMMUNION.**

**IT IS THE MARK OF A SELF-GIVING AND
GENEROUS COMMUNITY.**

- **THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD. SINCE THE
BEST PATH TO UNITY IS THROUGH THE
STOMACH, WE SHOULD NEVER MISS THE
OPPORTUNITY TO GATHER AROUND TABLES
FOR FOOD AND CONVERSATION. I
ABSOLUTELY CANNOT WAIT UNTIL WE
COME TOGETHER AT ORLEAN UMC --- AT
OUR LITTLE CHURCH IN THE COUNTRY -----
AND BREAK BREAD AND FELLOWSHIP WITH
ONE ANOTHER ONCE AGAIN**

- **THE PRAYERS. GOD RAISED JESUS UP AND IS THE POWER BEHIND OUR NEW LIFE IN CHRIST. OUR PRAYERS KEEP US CONNECTED TO THE GOD WHO CONTINUES TO RAISE US UP AND SEND US FORWARD.**

TODAY, WE ARE EXPERIENCING A CRISIS — THE EASTER CRISIS OF 2020. SO LET'S RESPOND BY IMITATING THE JERUSALEM CHRISTIANS, WHO FOLLOWED THE RISEN JESUS AND LAUNCHED A MOVEMENT THAT CHANGED THE WORLD.

**PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND
FOR ME.....AMEN**