**HE IS RISEN! OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRACE, GEN. 3:1-19, MT. 28:11-20, EASTER 2023.**

**If someone close to you is diagnosed** with stage 4 cancer, you’re likely to think about it all the time. For the 1 with cancer, days are filled with decisions about next steps in treatment, balancing the cost of expensive drugs & dealing with insurance claims. The 1st question on your or his/her lips is probably, **Why?**

**Why is it happening?** Why me? Why do bad things happen? Why the grief in this world, why the chaos, why the suffering? And though the questions go unanswered for the most part, the fact is these things do happen.

**There’re 1 M other concerns**, 1 M other fears & anxieties, tension between family members, drama with friends, threats in our world. We’re afraid for our safety, afraid for our future.

**When fear grips** me & panic wells up inside, I **remember** the words of Jesus: “I have told you all this so that you may have peace in Me. Here on earth you will have many trials & sorrows. But **take heart, because I have overcome the world.” (Jn. 16:33). It’s a bold claim.**

It’s not uncommon to hear politicians & world leaders talk about how they will bring about prosperity & peace—alas, to no avail. **But Jesus is different**. Did you catch that Jesus didn’t promise to take away our suffering. Nope. Not even we might, but we will. So **here’s the question: if Jesus, the Son of God, God, doesn’t take away the trials & sorrows, what good is He?** How can you have peace in the midst of pain & suffering? **How does He overcome the world?**

**The priests, religious leaders & politicians** of Jesus’ time also worried about His claims. They thought of Palestine as their kingdom, managed under their power & they believed that’s what Jesus was after. **But before you start on** about those wicked guys, think about yourself. It’s our nature to want power**. We aspire to be in control**. In fact, we may answer the “why” question with an emphatic, “Because I said so!” & not with a helpless shrug.

**Not Jesus**. **He enters the scene & turns the tables**. He did that literally in the temple when He saw the wickedness of the moneychangers. But **He also turned everything else upside down**. He blessed the poor, the mourners, the humble (meek), those who sought justice, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peace workers. He said it’s such as these—the ones the world looks down on, not the rich or powerful—who will inherit the kingdom of heaven.

**How do you think** the priests & religious leaders would have reacted to that? The poor inheriting anything? The humble? That’s not how anyone describes people of power.

**Here’s your line for the day: Jesus doesn’t make earthly sense**. Say it with me. That’s exactly the point. **Jesus does all things counter-intuitively**. When He’s arrested, He doesn’t resist. When His friend cuts off 1 of the soldier’s ears on the night He was betrayed, He scolds His friend & heals the man’s ear. When people tortured & whipped & mocked Him He didn’t lash out or strike back; instead, He pleaded, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.” **Here’s the point: wherever & whenever Jesus could have** carried hate & resentment in His heart, He did not. Instead, He filled His heart with empathy & compassion for His attackers.

**On the cross as He was dying for our wrongdoing**, He cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? **Now back to our suffering**: isn’t that the way we feel in the deepest places of our suffering—abandoned, alone & forsaken? **But we are not forsaken**. **The “why” question we ask** in the midst of our struggle is an earthly, looking in the rearview mirror kind of question. It keeps us analyzing, trying to make sense out of the senseless. Especially when we realize that nothing we can do or say will change the outcome we’re living today.

Listen up. Jesus Himself wasn’t rescued from the pain & suffering of this world. He chose to die on the cross. **Mary Magdalene & another woman named Mary** went to the tomb on a Sunday morning like this. They had walked beside Jesus & witnessed His love & grace. They were deeply grieved by His death. They’d hoped He was the One who would save the world. **For sure they were wrestling with the “why” question**. “Why, Lord, why? Why did this happen?”

**But not for long**. As they were standing there an earthquake shook the ground. An angel appeared, rolled away the stone & sat on top of it. The guards were so terrified they passed out. No doubt, the Marys’ were terrified too. But **the words of life poured out: “I know you’re looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead, just as He said** would happen. Come, see where His body was lying.” (Mt. 28:5, 6).

**The angel at the tomb calls us too, to come out of the shadow of the cross & into the light of resurrection, to turn from the “why” of what happened to the present & the future. The light of resurrection changes life from “why?” to “What now? What’s next?”**

“**Now, go quickly & tell His disciples that He’s risen from the dead** & is going ahead of you into Galilee. You’ll see Him there. Remember what I’ve told you.” **There’s no time to stand around & gawk at the empty tomb**. **Jesus has risen from the dead & is going ahead of you**—wherever it is you travel, even to the edge—not just of the earth but—of the grave & beyond!

**Christian Wiman** shares a profound truth: “Christ is not alive now because He rose from

the dead 2000 yrs. ago. He rose from the dead 2000 yrs. ago because He’s alive right now.”

(I believe in Jesus) **Christ is here now, in our brightest & bitterest moments—**in the stillness & in the storm, present at the birth or the stillbirth, with the ever-present peace, if we only have eyes to see & ears to hear. **Everything that happens, whether its broken or beautiful, is an opportunity for the grace of God to be made more evident in & through us**.

**The promise of the resurrection is** life & peace & joy ***now***, & life & peace **&** joy—***everlasting***—here on earth & after this life ends.

**Through Christ we’re given** the Holy Spirit to see & show God’s glory in all things. **But** **we** must choose to be bearers of that light. Choose to be people of action. We’re God’s way (remember the God-ways we are feasting on) on this earth for making beautiful things out of dust.

**So what does it mean when bad things happen in your life?** You try to make beautiful things happen. That’s only possible through Jesus & His promise of salvation. **Only by turning away from “why” & toward “what now, what next**.” We’ve focused in Lent on Hope-Full living. By looking to the hope we find in Jesus we can walk, meeting trial & victory with the same measure of peace & rest, **because absolutely nothing can ever separate us from the love of God**.

**Nothing can ever separate us from that love, made possible by the promise fulfilled in Jesus’ resurrection**. **He’s conquered death. He’s overcome the world. He’s removed the curse we read about in Genesis 3. What then shall we fear?** Rejoice that He’s no longer on the cross, no longer in the tomb. He’s risen. He’s alive! The light of the world is still in the world. His light is in you & in me. **Shine!**