

Easter Day
 April 1, 2018
 Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's
 Acts 10:34-43
 1 Corinthians 15:1-11
 John 20:1-18

Happy Easter! We have moved through the solemn forty days of Lent, and arrived at this date that is celebrated by 2.4 billion Christians around the world. We celebrate the resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was not the resuscitation of someone only thought to be dead; someone whom an EMT team was able to give CPR and revived him. This was something beyond medical knowledge and understanding. Jesus was not raised like his friend Lazarus, back to the old life, to live on for a few more years. Jesus was alive again, but alive in a different way, having a new dimension of life that began his journey back to the Holy Father; but even beyond that, he would soon be with the Father and at the same time would share his Spirit with everyone who would ask.

But what does this miracle 2,000 years ago really do for you and me today? How does it make our life different, better, or easier? Well, the answer to that leads me into the topic of spiritual discernment, as it was taught by the founder of the Jesuit order, Ignatius of Loyola. He lived in the early 1500's, and is well known for a manual he wrote to help provide spiritual formation for his followers – it was called *Spiritual Exercises*. These Ignatian Spiritual Exercises are used today. People sign up for a thirty day retreat that includes meditations on the life and ministry of Jesus, and his death and resurrection. The goal of the retreat is to discern a person's path in life that can lead them to glorifying God.

Ignatius identified two experiences that can help us see God's activity in our life. The terms for these experiences are spiritual "desolation" and "consolation". Listen to this list of characteristics that describe the experiences of desolation or consolation;

Times of Desolation:

Turn us away from God, and inward on ourselves
 Cut us off from community
 Crowd out our distant vision
 Drain us of energy

Times of Consolation:

Turn us toward God, and focused beyond ourselves
 Bond us more closely to our human community
 Restore balance and refresh our inner vision
 Show us where God is active in our lives and where he is leading us
 Release new energy in us

A while ago I met with some clergy friends, and we discussed experiences of desolation and consolation in our lives. One of the men in the group described that his wife has a very rare neurological disease that causes her to be in almost constant pain. The pain is disabling, and sometimes limits her ability to even move. There are times she cannot walk, or leave her house. She feels the isolation and pain of her disease, and her husband feels deep compassion and caring over what she is going through. Over the years, they have found out that there will be times of an hour, or sometimes a few hours, that the pain goes away. They celebrate these windows of relief, and they thank God for them. The man shared that they have discovered that the “consolation” part of her illness has made the “desolation” times easier to manage. There is a spiritual dimension to the difficult times; there is a sense of God’s grace in those difficult times. They know that God is still with her in them, and that there will be times to celebrate windows of relief. He shared that in fact, the good times are even better because of the reality of the difficult times. Does that make sense? I think it does. I can think of difficulties we go through that, if we look at the spiritual dimension of them, those difficult times help us to appreciate the good times even more. There is a moving closer to God that happens in the mix.

Jesus experienced spiritual desolation in his betrayal by Judas; the abandonment by his disciples; his prayers in Gethsemane; the torture by Roman occupation forces, and on the cross. Jesus faced desolation, but always with a response that moved him toward God. “Father, if you are willing, let this cup pass from me; however not my will, but yours be done.” (Luke 22:42) He knew the consolation that was there for him; he knew that there would be an Easter morning. He knew that God’s grace was with him.

Easter Day is celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is also a lesson in Jesus working through the experiences of desolation to find God there; and his fully appreciating times of consolation – always living in the center of God’s will.

Easter Day changes your life and mine, because we see that the experiences of both desolation and consolation can move us closer to God. In our Palm Sunday days, God is with us. In our Good Friday days, God is with us. In our Easter Days, God is with us. Which direction is your life taking you: toward God or away from God? The Easter event shows that we have a choice: Jesus Christ has defeated desolation, he has beaten death and he lives today, giving his Spirit to all who ask for it, so that every experience in our life can be an experience of God’s grace. That is the gift we celebrate today.

Alleluia, Christ is risen. *The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia! Amen.*