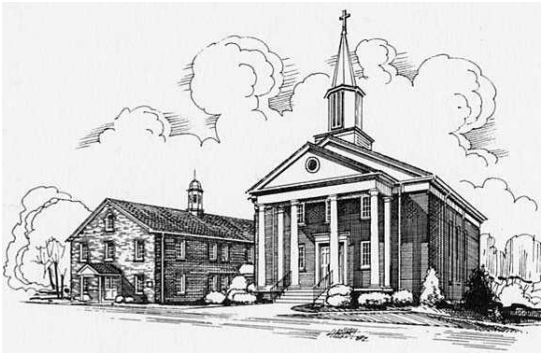
The Lessons Appointed for Use on the



Seventh Sunday of Easter

Year A

RCL

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11
John 17:1-11

The Collect

O God, the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: Do not leave us comfortless, but send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us, and exalt us to that

place where our Savior Christ has gone be-
fore; who lives and reigns with you and the
Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting.
Amen.

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you

in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

John 17:1-11

Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

“I have made your name known to those

whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to

you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

SERMON

1 Peter reminds us:

> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

We suffer today because of a virus but the principle remains unchanged. Faith isn't about avoiding suffering. Faith is about living through suffering to the glory of God. The Coronavirus offers a stunning opportunity for the community of faith to prayerfully examine our actions and thoughts and to repent and rededicate ourselves to the core values of our traditions.

My dear friend and colleague, Dr. Lon Oliver, wrote this week:

> **For two months we were united in grief and in our knowledge that the Coronavirus was devastating our wellbeing—our health and financial security. As people of faith, we were returning to the healing and wellness ministries that were once at the core of our traditions. Compassion, repentance, dependence, and hope were exorcising privilege, distrust and political posturing. No longer. As we explore re-opening, we are reverting to our old scripts and factions. It seems that we find more security in our parties and denominations than in the promise "in the image of God, God created them; male and female God created them" (Genesis 1:27b). We**

> **have once again forgotten our common birthright. May God have mercy.**[1]

One of his correspondents replied from the book of Acts:

> **For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.**[2]

Dr. Oliver has named the problem precisely. We turn to the teachings of heaven but briefly before reverting to our old ways. His correspondent also named the situation exactly. We are God's offspring and we live, move and have our being in Him. How, then, is it so ef-

1 Rev. Lon Oliver, lead pastor at Nicholasville Christian Church, Nicholasville, Ky
2 Acts 17:28 King James Version

fortless for us to blind ourselves to the suffering around us? I learned this week that the Navajo nation, an area larger than West Virginia, is the third most hard hit by the Coronavirus and that 40% of Navajo have no electricity, a similar number have no running water, and that most have no ready access to medical care.

I also learned of a pediatric death from Coronavirus this week, but the news coverage I see is of people at the beach, shoulder to shoulder. I learned that John Glenn's widow died of Coronavirus this week at the age of 100, but most of the news coverage is of people who

want to get tattoos and otherwise return to normal life, including church members. Perhaps the best-known example of the latter is the church choir practice in Mount Vernon, Washington. One infected person attended. Fifty-two members subsequently came down with the virus and two died. You can see why Dr. Oliver wrote as he did.

Yes, the focus of many is to return to normal as quickly as possible. We are a social species and need contact with others. We are also dependent on the health of the economy for the resources to support life. When we are deprived of these needs, we suffer. We, the faith

community, are reminded that we are called upon to share Christ's suffering, bringing healing to those who suffer.

> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.

This is challenging. Often we fail. Truly, just as Dr. Oliver said,

> **As people of faith, we were returning to the healing and wellness ministries that were once at the core of our traditions. Compassion, repentance, dependence, and hope were exorcising privilege, distrust and political pos-**

turing. No longer. As we explore re-opening, we are reverting to our old scripts and factions.

Now, we can get to the heart of the lesson, which we find in Jesus' Farewell Prayer, historically called "Jesus' High Priestly Prayer". His Disciples are gathered around the table with Him. Before Him lies the cross. In the preceding chapter, John's Greek is in second person plural – Jesus is addressing His Disciples. In Chapter 17, He speaks in second person singular. This is a prayer addressed to God, and we are being given the opportunity to hear it. Do not squander this gift!

"Father, the hour has come; glorify your

Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ... I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. … Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may

be one, as we are one."

Jesus is praying for the believing community. In the death and coming resurrection of Jesus, God's glory – His identity – will become visible to the believing community, empowering them in their way forward. Forward to what?

Will the world outside of the believing community see? It is not for me to say. Many will see their families suffering as the economic results of this virus decimate them, and, because they have no hope, they will react in ways which will make conditions worse. The believing community, those with hope, will be called upon to bring that hope and certainty to the

world, by returning to the healing and wellness ministries that were once at the core of our traditions. Compassion, repentance, dependence, and hope must once more exorcise privilege, distrust and political posturing. You, the believing community, are called to look upon the suffering of the world through the love of Christ, and to throw yourself into the task of offering hope to those who have none.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

In the Acts passage assigned for today, we read of the Ascension.

When the apostles had come together, they asked Jesus, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward

heaven?”

Your homework for this week is to meditate on the words of the two men in white robes. They asked, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?” Heaven is not where our work lies. Our work lies here in the dust of the earth, amid the sufferings of our brothers and sisters. Lend a hand to bring hope to the hopeless and relief to those who suffer the anxieties of this challenging time.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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