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**Green Blades Preaching Roundtable**

March 31st, 2024

Easter Sunday

Mark 16

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Patchogue, NY

This Easter, I’m concentrated on the promises God makes to us, at baptism and for the rest of our lives, and on the simple ways that any kind of water can remind us of those baptismal promises. My parsonage is located only 5 minutes from the Great South Bay, a brilliant scoop of water that lies between Long Island, New York, and her beloved cousin, Fire Island. It’s one of the greatest treasures I’d never heard anything about when I lived in the Midwest. A little sliver of calm seas standing between us and the roaring Atlantic, barely buffered by Fire Island, the Great South Bay is beloved playground for locals. It’s full of sailboats and motorboats shipping folks back and forth between beaches. Parents can often be found standing and pointing out landmarks across the water, or teaching their children to sail and fish. Nearly any time of day, eager groups of birds can always be seen, whooshing and diving above the waves.

Almost because it so beloved, the Bay has also been devastated by civil pollution. Only a few decades ago a thriving natural habitat for abundant oyster and clam colonies, there are hardly any to be found. I’ve heard that the Bay is only actually good for crabbing nowadays, and fishermen advise not to eat many in a row, for fear of digesting too much water, long polluted by the runoff from ceaseless motorboats and heavily fertilized lawns nearby. The Bay has changed, and yet it’s understood as a local ecosystem so vital to the community that across party lines, voters can be found participating in “Save the Bay” movements to invest in local wildlife, restore clam colonies, and educate neighbors about the how to ensure the bay’s ongoing vitality.

It’s no wonder that from a very young age, my congregants here on Long Island claim Noah’s Ark as their favorite story. Water is a vivid companion in this island life. If God’s got any clue about how to care for people around here, God’s got to be able to calm waters and find rainbows easily. A few of my oldest members still get lost in stories about the hurricane of ‘38, which cleared out quite an amazing thoroughfare of the island’s best beaches, and created a breach between the Atlantic Ocean and the Great South Bay, which took years to fill. One recently brought a calendar in to show me, featuring stories of Katherine Hepburn clinging desperately to a branch at her beach home to save herself from the deep. And even more contemporary congregants remember the way Sandy blasted the bay, creating a breach to the ocean once again, and destroying plenty of homes along the way.

And yet, for all the threat of storms, the Bay attracts people like a magnet. Recently, a friend of mine was telling me how difficult it was for her to sleep longer than the sun. Her body seems to be extra sensitive to dawn’s first light. As soon as she sees light breaking through her window, almost before her brain is awake, she finds her body moving into the car and driving down toward the Great South Bay, where she can see the first rays of light breaking in ripples over gentle ways. Luckily here in Patchogue, NY in the middle of the south shore of Long Island, we are never further than fifteen minutes from the bay, so it is not unreasonable to make this a morning practice. Even in the early morning, it’s rare to ever be completely alone, parked along the water. For one reason or another, folks are always lingering there. Some spend hours at the marina, just parked in their cars, absorbed by the flow of the tide. So many spend hours there, in fact, that the town has had to put up signs to remind them not to idle—lest the water transfix a body enough that they forget their ignition key.

One morning after a rainstorm, my friend told me, she woke up extra grateful for the sun, drove down to the Bay, and found the whole marina submerged in several feet of water, completely absorbed by the Bay. Stunned, she stayed longer that morning, focused not on the sunrise but on the power of the water, completely consuming the land. How fragile the island seemed then, so vulnerable to the whims of the storms. And yet, dawn still came, as pink and purple and orange as it ever had been. How fragile she felt, as she imagined her car getting swept into the water, and yet how clear the morning light was, and how beautiful the water looked, as it swelled around the high poles of the dock.

When she painted for me the image of the sunrise rippling over the flooded bay, it struck me as a perfect metaphor for Easter this year—the fragility of our grasp on creation, matched by the certainty of the sun rising. Every year, we are compelled by our liturgical calendar to greet Easter in all of its brilliant color again, no matter what is going on in this mixed up world, flooded with more and bigger problems and fewer and more complicated solutions. Every year, we must find it within ourselves to greet Christ our Savior anew, and reintegrate his salvation into our fragile human experience. Some years it’s harder than others to understand how Christ is at work by our sides.

Martin Luther tends to write about Christ’s resurrection as a new promise of love made to us by God, a sign of hope created for Christian disciples that upends all other signs of God’s love ever construed. But, for all of my confessional training, I dare to say that I side more with Calvin’s take on God’s promises. I take heart in what Calvin writes about the immutability of God in a commentary on Jeremiah, “God who once made a covenant with God’s chosen people has not changed in purpose, as though God has forgotten God’s faithfulness… The covenant which God made at first is perpetual.” Perhaps we Lutherans can learn a little something from Calvin this Easter. What if Jesus is not a sign of God’s fidelity that overrides everything God ever made before, but a heartwarming renewal of those promises, an integration of those promises into our lives day after day. If once God drew our attention to rainbows as a living symbol of his promise to protect creation, perhaps in Jesus God draws our attention to the sun, the steadfast sun, as the daily sign of his love which can shatter even the waves of a flood into brilliant, rippling light.

I praise God for giving us the gift of Jesus, who is as connected to us day to day as the sun is to the sea. And likewise I praise God that every Easter morning here in Patchogue, we gather at that fragile little outpost, that sweet, windtorn and floodscarred marina, to create a community worship service alongside several different local congregations and many neighbors who only worship on that one day of the year. How sweet it always is that together we wake up very very early to stand and look out of the water, and celebrate the Son rising on Easter Day.



Claire (she/her/hers) was born and raised at a little family church in the Chicago suburbs, where both sides of her family lived. She discerned a call to ministry during her senior year at Indiana University, where her studies in English and History led her to theological questions, and her leadership at church and in a Lutheran sorority kept her energized. She went to seminary at Yale Divinity School, where she reveled in ecumenical opportunities, and she graduated during the height of COVID in May of 2020. She has served as an inner city hospital chaplain and as an apprentice at the LGBTQ+ ministry wonderland in Baltimore at partnered St. Mark’s and Dreams and Visions Lutheran churches. She is now serving her first call as the solo pastor the Lutheran Church of Our Savior in Patchogue, New York, where she delights in creating loving worship, deep relationships, and vibrant community connections. She most often finds that the Holy Spirit reaches her in poetry books, yoga classes, delicious meals, and live performances.