

“Linked”
 1 Peter 3:18-22
 February 21, 2021
 Rev. David Hutchinson

A cocktail party...

A terrorist cell...

Ancient bacteria...

An international business conglomerate...

The internet...

A neighborhood association...

The church.

They all have something in common. / But they SOUND very different, I think.

Listen again and see if you can figure out a similarity.

A terrorist cell... Ancient bacteria...

An international business conglomerate... The internet...

A neighborhood association... The church.

They are all networks. / They are all networks in which things or people are linked.

The links may be part of something threatening - - or something enticing.

But terrorists in a cell and neighbors on a block and computers on the internet are all linked together for a common purpose. / And when it comes to human networks, we are all connected - - for good or bad - - to others. / Some of whom we have never met.

It seems to me that sometimes these connections cause suffering - - and sometimes they are a way to endure or to survive suffering. / A bacterial network can cause sickness and suffering. / A business network can help get you a job - - or it can work to cheat people out of their money. / A church network can provide support and prayer during times of suffering.

So it is important to pay attention to how we are linked - - and to whom we are linked.

The scripture reading for today suggests a link as well. / In the New Testament letter of 1 Peter, baptism is described. / The way that the Bible tells it - - there is a LINK between OUR suffering and the suffering of JESUS. / And the LINK between OUR suffering and Jesus suffering - - is baptism. / Our suffering is linked to the suffering of Jesus. / AND in a similar way - - Jesus resurrection - - LINKS us - - to new LIFE - - and is a way to ENDURE and SURVIVE suffering.

So to put it simply, the Bible reading for today helps us answer the question: how can we survive suffering? / And the answer has something to do with the fact that OUR suffering is LINKED to JESUS suffering. / The letter of 1st Peter says that Jesus endured suffering and sin and death on a cross. / Jesus LINKED himself to us and to our suffering and death. / And then like a lifeline in a storm - - Jesus pulls us along - - through the suffering - - to new life.

The WAY this happens - - is baptism.

And don't get this wrong - - it's not that the water of baptism somehow physically washes us clean of suffering - - that's not what the Bible says. / Baptism is a SIGN of how God saves us through the Spirit and the resurrection. / The act of baptism by water is just a SIGN of what God is doing in Jesus - - to RAISE us up from the suffering of life.

Nevertheless - - there is a LINK - - between us and Jesus.

A link between OUR suffering and the suffering of Jesus.

So that - - when we experience suffering - - we are not alone.

We are linked.

Linked to Jesus.

The letter of 1 Peter uses the example of the ancient story of Noah and the flood.

The account of the great flood is in the very first chapters of the book of Genesis.

And 1 Peter says that just as people were saved from drowning in the water of the flood -
- so we are saved through baptism - - from sin and death.

One way to describe it is that: we are LINKED to Jesus in his death - - and we are ALSO LINKED to Jesus in his resurrection to LIFE.

During the season of Lent, which covers the next five weeks, we will be exploring images of Jesus in the Bible. / Each week we will read from a different letter found in the New Testament. / The sermons will explore the person of Jesus as described in these letters. We will try to discover who Jesus is according to these ancient writings, and what Jesus does for us. So rather than focusing on our behavior first, as we sometimes do during Lent when we give up chocolate or take on additional prayer and study - - this year we will begin with Jesus and let Jesus lead our way.

Today we see that Jesus is one who suffers and who lives in the Spirit.

Jesus is one who was baptized and to whom we are LINKED in our baptism.

We are LINKED to Jesus in his death - -

- - and we are ALSO LINKED to Jesus in his resurrection to LIFE.

An article by an Episcopal priest named Alan Jones explores how baptism links us to Jesus in life and death. / This is from the 5th chapter of his book on Pilgrimage and the Passion of Christ. / He says that certain diseases heighten our sense of our mortality and sometimes the fear of death. / In the nineteenth century it was tuberculosis - - then it was cancer. / More recently it was AIDS - - and though he doesn't say it - - most recently COVID and the virus.

He says that at some point we realize that time keeps marching on and "none of us are going to get out if this alive".

The road to healing - - and the road to living in hope - - leads right by the foot of the cross. / But if we want to live and heal and hope - - we have to acknowledge the suffering and the fear.

Jones in his book - - points to a Latin-American baptismal liturgy in which the priest takes the person to be baptized and plunges the person into the water and says, "I kill you - - in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit! / And I raise you to new LIFE - - in Christ!"

It certainly is dramatic. / Liturgy like that gets your attention.

But what he reminds me of is that LIFE and DEATH are LINKED.

We live BETWEEN - - life and death - - and new life.

And as he says, sometimes death takes you by the scruff of the neck and says:

"Hey you! Wake up! What are you LIVING for?!"

As followers of Christ - - we are called to LIVE - - and to LOVE the world.

There is definitely a part of me that RESISTS being LINKED to Jesus!

Who would want to be linked to the suffering of Jesus?

Who would want to be linked to the one who died on a cross?

It seems easier NOT to think about all that.

But maybe life will be challenging no matter what.

Maybe sometimes we will suffer - - no matter WHAT we do.

In the end - - the LINK - - the baptismal link to Jesus - - is about LOVE.

Alan Jones points to the words of the 14th century mystic Julian of Norwich who wrote about Jesus suffering and death - - like this:

I wanted to know what was our Lord's MEANING - - in suffering - - she said.

And what she discovered about the meaning of Christ she described this way:

“Love was his meaning
 Who showed it to you? Love.
 What did he show you? Love.
 Why did he show it? Love.”

Suffering may FEEL like death - - but it can be the way to a fuller LIFE.

So says Alan Jones and Julian of Norwich.

Thinking about all this, I came across information on a Japanese poetry form called Renga. / Renga means a “linked poem”. / This way of writing poetry developed 700 years ago in Japan - - as a way to encourage COLLABORATION. / Working together.

It seems to me there is a lot of talk now - about if it’s possible for us to work together.

Can we still expect meaningful collaboration in our divided culture?

I don’t know that ancient Japanese poetry is the answer.

But nevertheless, it got me thinking about collaboration.

The way “Renga” or linked poetry works is that there is a common theme.

Poets work in pairs or groups of three - - and they take turns - - each one writes a two line or a three line stanza - - and the stanzas are linked together by a common theme. / Sometimes they can be hundreds of lines long.

The key is that the new stanza needs to ADVANCE the theme - - while MAINTAINING the link to the previous idea. / Maintaining and advancing...

Advancing and maintaining...

Imagine working on a Renga poem with Jesus as partner.

Or imagine working on a Renga with someone who is suffering right now.

How would the link you share - - change you?

We are linked to one another.

We are linked whether we like it or not.

We are linked whether we cooperate or fight.

We are linked for good - - for for ill.

And... We are linked to Jesus.

Our suffering and the suffering of Jesus are linked.

And the link goes through baptism.

And the link can save us - - from feeling like we are drowning.

The link can be a way to LIVE more fully.

May it be so - - for you and for me.

Amen