

EASTER 4, May. 12, 2019, Year C

- We've had the strangest pattern of weather lately. For every warm and beautiful day gracing us, *several* cold and wet days have followed. This pattern has provided a practical illustration of a general truth. Whether it's the weather, or more abstract things like *right* and *wrong*, *we often find 'light' and 'dark,' and good and bad, side-by-side!* Contrast between light and dark is, of course, central to the art of photography, and to much of painting. But *the same is true in other important aspects of life, and especially in spirituality.*
- *We know we have been caught up in God's ongoing work of redemption. Yet, we continue to experience the effects of sin alongside God's providential grace.* We find this *side-by-side* presence of contrasting things in another way. *Just like sin alongside grace*, think about how **abundance and scarcity co-exist**, one beside the other, in so many aspects of our lives. Prosperous businesses sit next to run-down neighborhoods, while wealthy countries share borders with those having marginal economies. Irrigated fields vibrant with color lie beside patches of arid land.
- Now, though *we all encounter the same world, we see it so differently, even when we are side-by-side!* Notice how some of us go through life as *optimists*. And others of us find ourselves viewing everything as *pessimists*. Those of us who identify as '*pessimists*' often say we are *merely being realistic*. But then, by implication, *optimists* are those who live according to *fantasy!* We typically assume that these differences result from *divergent* ways of seeing and perceiving. *But how is it that people who look at the same world, see it so differently?* And why are we prone to look at it *negatively*, focusing on **scarcity** rather than on discerning **abundance**? These are important questions.
- As we know, *John in the book of Revelation records a series of visions. "I looked,"* he says, *"and there was a great multitude that no one could count,*

from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the Lamb."¹ John's vision of the multitude is not as dramatic as some other images in Revelation. But *even the relatively tame scene in our reading today can strike us as fantasy. Most of us never see things like John describes.* And, as we say, *if I don't see it, I therefore don't believe it!*

- *But what if?* What if *invisible* and *spiritual* things are *just as real* as what we see and touch? One attribute I appreciate about the photographer, **Dewitt Jones**, is how he turns *conventional wisdom* on its head. *Instead of limiting belief to what we perceive, he challenges us to believe, so that we might see.* In his view, *perception does not enable belief. Instead, belief enables perception.* Our materialistic culture, which prizes empirical data, might lead us to debate whether Jones' approach is really *correct*. But *he is a photographer, whose business is seeing*, and he records what can be apprehended by sight. Either way, *Dewitt Jones articulates a significant spiritual principle.*²
- We might imagine that in John's captivity on the prison island of Patmos, the seer of Revelation had '*private visions*'. Denied the freedom to gather for worship with other believers, *God may have given him compensatory visions* to sustain him in his solitude. *Yet, it seems clear that John was a person of deep faith prior to receiving his visions.* And what he records in the part of Revelation we hear today should sound *familiar* to us, especially during Eastertide.
- Here are some words we pray every Sunday during this season: "It is truly right to glorify you, Father, and to give you thanks...Fountain of life and source of all goodness, *you made all things and fill them with your blessing...* **Countless throngs of angels** stand before you... *Joining with them, we sing* "Holy, holy, holy..."³ In this prayer, *we are part of the same multitude that John reports having seen*, gathered before the throne of the

EASTER 4, May. 12, 2019, Year C

Lamb. As we join the community he sees, we share their praise and thanksgiving.

- Even more to the point, notice *what we sing about*: “Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, **heaven... and earth... are full of your glory.**” I have always loved what those words suggest ~ **heaven, and earth, are full of God’s glory! The world is filled with wonder, grace and blessing!**
- In our Eucharist, we say what we believe. And our believing is then key to our seeing. In the same prayer, we also say, “we acclaim you, holy Lord... **Your mighty works reveal your wisdom and love.**” In other words, whether we *perceive it or not*, **God’s creative handiwork all around us reveals God’s wisdom and love. Grace inhabits Creation.** Because **God’s handiwork is revelatory**, it’s possible for us *to see more than we do now*. Not only did the Creator make all things and fill them with divine blessing, **God created all things, including us, to rejoice in the splendor of God’s own radiance.** When **we perceive this blessing within ourselves**, in each other, and in all that surrounds us, we then *give voice to every creature under heaven, as we offer our gifts* of bread and wine.
- And yet, paradoxically, **we call the places where we live and work between Sundays, “the real world!”** But **these are not places where we typically are involved in worshipping God.** And sometimes they are places where we worship *other* things. By describing our workplaces and neighborhoods as ‘*reality*,’ we mean the *actual* things we see and touch, and about which we collect facts. And yet, **the real world is far greater, and involves things that we perceive and know when we gather here for Eucharist.** In the Eucharist, we worship in fellowship with unseen angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven.

EASTER 4, May. 12, 2019, Year C

- As we have observed, *in this life we see both beauty and ugliness, goodness and evil, and truth and falsehood, each beside the other.* But *preserving both light and dark is not God's ultimate goal.* In the End, *all that is not of God, nor consistent with God's glory, will cease to be.* Only in the present age do abundance and scarcity sit side by side, in a contrast not always evident to us. We are quick to notice abundant wealth manifest by fine buildings and organizations across our cities. Concerned about justice, we question their juxtaposition with people who are marginalized by poverty. Yet, *we are ever-slow to see the abundant blessing with which God has filled all things, which exist to rejoice in the splendor of God's radiance.* *The earth is full of God's glory, and yet we so rarely see it. Why?* Why is that?
- Perhaps it's because *we forget to look for it.* I know that's often true for me. As with the cultivation of other virtues, *perceiving abundance needs to be practiced.* Yet, it is easier to accept a *false* belief. We then assume that the only things of value are *material* things, things we can *physically* see, *measure* and *purchase, or bank on.* This false belief limits our perception, and displaces correct belief. *God-nurtured belief prompts us to look for abundant grace.* For grace lies within all that we physically encounter, and take for granted. Our challenge, then, is *to remember what we believe.* *Through believing, we are enabled to see what is real.* "Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, *heaven and earth are full of your glory.*" And, as the prophet Isaiah says, "*the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.*"



James Tissot, *Jesus Walks in the Portico of Solomon*

John 10:22-30

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

The readings appointed for this day are:

Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22–30

NOTES

¹ Words from our second reading, from Revelation 7:9-17.

² See his website for more information concerning his approach: <https://dewittjones.com/>

³ These words are from Eucharistic Prayer D, BCP:372ff.