UHPC WORSHIP—May 05, 2019

SERMON TOPIC: “DIVINE ENCOUNTERS WITH THE RISEN CHRIST”

As we continue to savor the season of the Resurrection of Christ Jesus, I invite us to engage with the experiences of the earlier disciples and apostles of ancient times. We want to not only engage, but if possible, to taste of its joy, its excitement, its struggles, and its reality. Maybe we can reach back and experience even a small taste of what it was like then. Since Jesus is still alive, what will it take for His disciples of today to experience Him as the others did back then? I believe that with God all things are possible. So why are Christian churches not regularly experiencing the presence of the Risen Christ as we should? Back then, there were many and varied divine encounters with the Risen Christ. He appeared to those who believed and who obeyed Him. (His disciples) Included in the three main characters we will look at today, there was one who did **not** believe and who did **not** obey, but actually hated Jesus and went about with the sole and evil intention to harass, shackle, and imprison both men and women believers. This one was Saul of Tarsus who was renamed—Paul. The other two people mentioned in the texts read to us today were: John The Evangelist, who wrote the Book of Revelation, and Simon Peter who earlier identified Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, but later denied Him during the time of the intense suffering on trumped up charges.

Paul had a divine encounter with the Risen Christ some years after He was crucified, rose again, and ascended. His resurrection power and transforming grace was flowing and spreading throughout the nation like wild fire. The elites and students of the Law, the Scribes, The Pharisees, and the civic leaders were at a loss as to how to contain it. They were losing their following and control of the masses. This had to stop! So, Paul decided to make it his primary mission to get letters of approval from the authorities to go to Damascus to capture, arrest, and imprison the “PEOPLE OF THE WAY.” (They were not yet called Christians.) He gathered some like-minded friends to go with him.  **But as he neared Damascus, He had a DIVINE ENCOUNTER WITH THE RISEN CHRIST. A light from heaven flashed around him and he fell off his (HIGH) horse to the ground. He heard a voice from heaven saying: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” He asked: “Who are you Lord?” The voice said: “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and go into the City and you will be told what to do.”**

**Paul** was sincere in his intention to protect the Law of Moses. What He did not yet realize was that Christ Jesus had come to fulfill the Law and to replace it with Grace, mercy, and forgiveness leading to Salvation, abundant life, and eternal life. He did not know that Salvation by SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS, was not enough to cleanse anyone of sin and to give them a transformed heart, mind, soul, and spirit… a rebirth from above. IT WOULD TAKE THE UNBLEMISHED BLOOD OF ONE WHO WAS FULLY HUMAN AND YET FULLY GOD to cleanse the human conscience of sin. REMEMBER-THIS DIVINE ENCOUNTER HAPPENED SOME TIME AFTER THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF CHRIST JESUS!

Then there was that awesome, profound, and amazing revelation of Christ Jesus given to **John.** The entire Book of Revelation is about the Risen Christ slaughtered and enthroned in heaven. It is about the richness, devotion, joy-filled, divine, sincere, angelic, and holy worship going on in heaven because the Lamb was deemed WORTHY to lose the seven seals and to open the Scroll that was written on. John wrote some years after the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. He was given a vision of what heaven would be like for those who believe and obey. It was about the final day of Judgement also. THIS DIVINE ENCOUNTER WAS GIVEN TO JOHN IN A PICTURESQUE WAY SO READERS MIGHT GET A GLIMPSE OF WHAT THE END TIME (ESCHATALOGY) WOULD BE LIKE. At first, John wept because it appeared that no one was worthy to unseal and open the scroll. But then one of the Elders told him not to weep because there was one who prevailed and would be able to do so. He was the Lion of Judah from the Root of David. (JESUS THE RISEN CHRIST) John saw the Lamb that was slain, STANDING UP among the Four Living Creatures and the twenty- four elders. The Lamb had seven horns (power) and seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent out into the earth. THE LAMB TOOK THE SCROLL FROM THE HAND OF THE ONE WHO SAT ON THE THRONE.  **When this happened the twenty four elders and the four Living Creatures with all the angels fell before the Lamb and worshipped with golden harps and a new song singing: “You are worthy to take the Scroll and to open the seals, for You were slaughtered, and by Your blood You ransomed for God saints from every tribe, language, people, and nation and You have made them a Kingdom of Priests serving God, and they will reign on the earth. … Thousands and myriads of angels surrounded the Throne and worshipped the Lamb singing with full voice: Worthy is the Lamb to receive power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessings!” THEN THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES SAID: “AMEN.” THIS WAS JOHN’S DIVINE ENCOUNTER WITH THE RISEN CHRIST SOME YEARS AFTER HIS RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION.**

Then we have **Simon Peter** and six other disciples (the 7) who seemed to be just hanging out by the Sea of Galilee. This was during the forty-day period that Jesus walked the earth after His resurrection Jesus had not yet ascended. Peter, being a man of action, decided he was going back to his old trade of fishing from which Jesus had originally called Him. The others decided to join him. They toiled all night but caught nothing. When it was near dawn, they heard a voice from the shore asking: “Children, you have caught nothing…have you?” They answered “NO.” He told them to cast their net to the right side of the boat. When they did, they caught a great draught of fish. John, the beloved disciple, pointed out that it was the Lord who was speaking to them from the shore. Peter, who had somewhat undressed for the fishing expedition, grabbed his clothes, put it on, and jumped into the water. When they got to shore, the Lord had prepared a breakfast of fish and bread for them. After breakfast, **the Lord asked Peter three times: -“Peter, do you love me?” Peter became impatient for he had already answered twice. The Lord reaffirmed and redirected Peter’s mission telling him: “Feed my Lambs. Tend My Sheep. Feed My Sheep.”** Then as Jesus had said to Peter when He first called him, He repeated: **“FOLLOW ME.”** Then Jesus implied to Peter how he would ultimately glorify God in his death in his older years.

In THIS DIVINE ENCOUNTER, Jesus had not yet ascended. Peter’s mission was clarified. Jesus tested his commitment, dedication, and intentions… DID HE JUST LOVE THE THINGS JESUS COULD GIVE HIM OR DID HE ACTUALLY LOVE JESUS HIMSELF FOR THE RIGHT REASON? We might ask ourselves the same question today and check to see if we ourselves are following Jesus because we love and appreciate Him or because of what we think we can get in this world? Do we love Him because of the price He paid for our Salvation to give us abundant and eternal life? Do we love Him because He endured all the pain, indignities, and shame on the Cross for our sakes? Do we love Him because He fulfilled the Law on our behalf that we were unable to do for ourselves? Do we love Him because He has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit and is making us children of God who belong to the priesthood of all believers? OR are we interested because He can meet our material needs? MAY WE KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT OUR INTENTIONS AND ADJUST OUR MINDS AND HEARTS ACCORDINGLY!

I want to ask us today this question: “WHAT WILL WE DO WITH THIS RISEN CHRIST IN WHOM WE BELIEVE? -- WE CAN JOIN THE HEAVENLY CHOIRS, THE ANGELIC VOICES, THE TWENTY- FOUR ELDERS, AND THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES AND WORSHIP HIM. --WE CAN DO ALL WE CAN TO INVITE OTHERS INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD TO BECOME A PART OF THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS IN THE KINGDOM. --WE CAN SHOW OUR LOVE FOR CHRIST AND OUR IDENTITY WITH HIM BY FOLLOWING AND OBEYING HIS CALL TO TEND AND TO FEED HIS SHEEP AND HIS LAMBS.

MAYBE SOME OF US HAVE HAD DIVINE ENCOUNTERS WITH THE RISEN CHRIST. HOW HAS IT CHANGED OUR LIVES? --HOW ARE WE USING THAT DIVINE ENCOUNTER TO CONVINCE OTHERS OF THE REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION AND ENCOURAGING THEM TO BECOME A PART OF THE KINGDOM OF THE PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS?

As we can see, the LORD JEHOVAH, our God in Christ Jesus, can use different people in different ways. If God can change an enemy like Paul and an impetuous, vacillating Peter and make them “fishers of men” Is there any reason He can’t use you and me? Jesus can and will clarify our purpose and call us to follow Him. If we follow Him, our fishing expedition and missions will **not** be fruitless, but we will become fishers of men and produce a great harvest of souls. May it be so, for us in our time for we are trusting in the power of the Risen Christ to direct us as to where to cast our nets for a great draught of fish, to give us a clearer vision of the worship and authority of the Lamb upon the throne, and not turn back to our old ways, but go forward in God’s Grace and receive our abundant and eternal life as promised.

Through the presence and power of the Risen Christ it shall be so.

AMEN.

Rev. Brenda R. Berry/ Pastor-Moderator

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