**“The Kingdom, the Power and the Glory”**

Rev. Clinton G. Roberts First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest Easter Sunday April 17, 2022

 When I was out in the desert of Anza-Borrego State Park, I found myself climbing upward through a bleak and rocky landscape dotted with Cholla and Brittlebush, Ocotillo and squat Barrel Cactus. The nearest road was an empty stretch of highway over four miles away, still visible across the hills and the wash I had walked up in the clear morning air. Other than the rhythmic crunch of by boots and the sight of raven wings high in the distance, the world around me was silent and empty and still.

 Approaching the saddle where the narrow canyon I was climbing boxed out, I noticed a tail of scree on the hillside. Clambering up, I found a black hole up there: and abandoned mine. “Who would wanted to climb all the way up here to toil away in the blazing heat?” I wondered, without even a spring nearby to refresh them? What was down that shaft? Gold? Nickel? Silver? My San Diego BackCountry Map stated in bold letters: “If you come upon an abandoned mine—don’t enter it!” So, of course, I had to go in, working my way 60 to 80 feet down that mineshaft, until things began to get scary. “What might be lurking down here?” I wondered. “Lizards and snakes? A mountain lion? Maybe the skull and bones of that miner?” I turned on my trusty phone, but its light revealed nothing below me except deep darkness.

 Turning my head, I saw the mine’s opening high above me: a brilliant circle of gleaming, cerulean blue. Being a person prone to metaphorical thinking, I found myself thinking about my life existentially. Here I was, halfway down a mineshaft, seated upon the hard rocks of this world with the darkness of death below me and the brilliant heavens above. Which way was I going? Was I going down—or going up? Needless to say, I turned around, and climbed out of that mineshaft after taking a picture of the opening above me, thinking, “This is going to be perfect for Easter. “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” said the angel. “He is not here. He is risen.” Climbing out of that mineshaft into bright light and far horizons felt a little bit like climbing into a whole new world.

II

 I got a call the other day from my friend Adam, pastor of a congregation down in Tinley Park. He informed me that our dear brother in Christ the Rev. Dr. Eddie Knox was in Northwestern Memorial, suffering from inoperable cancer. The prognosis was bleak. We agreed to meet up to see our old friend together. As I drove downtown the next morning, I thought of meeting Eddie forty years ago in seminary this month. He had warm eyes, a broad smile and a deep, slow laugh. He never appeared to be in a hurry. When he was with you—he gave you his full attention. He seemed to have all the time in the world…

 Over the years, I helped Eddie to rebuild his church on the Southside and he helped us rebuild our church in Naperville. We used to take the Confirmation Class to worship there each year—and Eddie would come out to worship with us with his choir. I’ll never forget how he taught the Lord’s Prayer at a men’s retreat called the Great Banquet. He told the men that the Lord’s Prayer was, along with their baptism and the Lord’s Supper— one of the church’s greatest possessions. “You will never need to worry about how or what to pray for,” he said. “This prayer says it all.” Just six short Petitions, with no “me” or “my” or “mine” anywhere to be found. Only “our” and “us” and “thy” and “thine.” “Feed us, forgive us, lead us, deliver us, for thine is the Kingdom,” Eddie would say, smiling at us with his bright, warm gaze; “And thine is the Power,” he would continue, his voice now rising in volume, his smile growing broader still; “And thine is the Glory!” his voice now booming across the conference room, “Forever, and ever, and ever, and ever, and ever, and ever,” he kept repeating, until we all couldn’t help ourselves but laughingly joined in with him, “And ever! And ever! And ever!” Eddie had made his point. It wasn’t about us. It never was. Not our little kingdoms; not our presumption of power; and not our vain self-glorifications. Not one word about “me,” “my” or “mine.” It was all about God’s kingdom of righteousness, and the power of love, and the glory of our heavenly parent, who adopted us into a family of forgiveness, acceptance and faith. Eddie understood the reality of this Prayer better than most people. And he knew that the final Doxology: “the Kingdom, the Power and Glory”—would stand fast forever, and never come to an end. For my good friend Eddie, there was no existential dilemma. He knew where he was going. He was “going up.”

III

 During Lent we’ve been studying the Lord’s Prayer using Adam Hamilton’s excellent book by the same name. On this Easter, we are celebrating its conclusion that is beautifully set forth on the banner behind me: the Doxology that was added to the Prayer by a second generation of believers as they used it in worship at the end of the First century. We find it written this way in the Didache, a small book used perhaps for the preparation of believers for baptism, where we are instructed to say the Lord’s Prayer three times each day. I’ve doing that throughout Lent, and I can promise you that if you do it—it will change the way you live.

 There is another prayer that Jesus prayed aloud in order to teach his disciples: the Farewell Prayer at the close of his Final Discourse in the Gospel of John. Knowing that “his hour had come,” he prayed that the Father would “glorify” him through his coming crucifixion by enabling him to “finish the work” God gave him to do. What was that holy work? To forgive us; to make atonement for sin; to reconcile the world to God—and us to one another, through the new Covenant poured out in his blood. “It is finished,” said Jesus, as he breathed his last. That is what he was praying for: that by his death he would glorify God.

 But there was another glory that Jesus prayed for that night in the Upper Room: the glory that the Son shared with the Father before the creation of the world. We glimpsed it at Jesus’ Transfiguration. But now we behold it fully in the glory of his resurrection. Death does not have the last word. Life does. And that word isn’t “no”—it is “yes.” “Yes—I do love you,” says our God. “I always have.” “My love for you is everlasting.” “Forever. And ever. And ever.” “You’re not going down. You’re going up.”

IV

 This war in Ukraine has laid hold of our fears, our outrage, and our sorrow—as indeed it should and must. The aggression unleashed upon this sovereign nation is inconscionable, inescusable, and barbaric. For Stalin, to Hitler, and now Putin—this nation of Ukraine has been subjected to atrocities again and again and again. The Holodomor: Stalin’s genocide of famine in the 1930s; the Babi Yar holocaust of 350,000 Jews in Kyiv in 1941; and now this: Putin’s “liberation” of the Ukrainian People. It must be resisted. It must be denounced. But the fear it engenders? That must be overcome by something greater: by the spirit of freedom and the power of love.

 There’s a song going around: a song of freedom called “When Viburnum blooms red in the Meadow,” a song sung by a Ukrainian rockstar named Andriiy Khlyvniuk, who returned to Ukraine from America to fight for his people. His rendition, sung acappella at the top of his lungs in Kyiv’s Sofiskaya Square alone at dawn caught fire across his nation—and the world. Young Ukrainian children started singing along with him on YouTube. Then people of all ages. Even Pink Floyd joined in, breaking thirty years of silence to sing “Hey! Hey! Rise Up!” This is what the triumph of the Spirit looks like and sounds like: “A little child shall lead them,” says the Prophet, with a “love that casts out fear.” Nothing can overcome this. Not now. And not ever.

 In the same way, Jesus said to Martha on his way to raise Lazarus, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, though they must die, will live. And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” said Martha. She believed. Because she loved and believed in him.

V

 My wife Deb tells a story about visiting a couple in our church in Naperville on Maundy Thursday of Holy Week. Hospice had just been brought in, and the two had a full-time caregiver from Ukraine: a beautiful, humble, and loving man named Al. Al was seated at the kitchen table, where there were eggs, odd-shaped pens, a candle and many colors of ink. He was creating intricate patterns across the delicate canvas the eggshell, using etchings of wax and dye. He handed Deb one: it was the most amazing Easter egg she’d ever seen. They are called Pysanky eggs, a Ukrainian word which means “writing.” Each egg is meant to be a written hope or prayer. Ukrainians believe that each egg makes a difference. And when they are connected, egg to egg to egg—they believe the chain they form will hold back evil from being released into the world.

 What if we were to think of ourselves in the same way this Easter: as people who believe in the Resurrection? That God’s Kingdom of peace will prevail upon earth? That love is its power and its glory its service? That we, too, can become like these Pysanky eggs, linked together against the darkness of this world, each one of us a beautiful, living prayer: “Let thy kingdom come, Lord. For the Power and Glory are yours, Lord. Not ours, but yours alone, Lord. Now and forever. Amen.”

Epilogue

 When we arrived at Eddie’s hospital room, Adam and I found his wife and daughters there with him. It was evident that he was dying. He knew it, and was unafraid. He greeted me softly with his same old smile, his eyes gleaming with affection. His love was washing over each one of us now—and Someone else’s love, too—as shared the Lord’s Supper together, and said the Lord’s Prayer. And when we reached its end, Eddie smiled and whispered, “For ever; and ever; and ever—as we all joined with him in tears. “And ever. And ever. And ever.” A few days later, Eddie stepped fully out into the open—into the glory and presence of the Lord.

 So if you happen to find yourself halfway down some mineshaft, looking down and looking up, remember Eddie—and remember this: we’re not going down into darkness. We’re going to rise up to the light. “He is not here, for he is risen,” said the angel. And so shall we. Because the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, Lord. Yours alone.

For ever. And ever. And ever. And ever. And ever!

Amen.