Easter 4 Year A (During the Covid-19 Pandemic)
The Economist *and the Resurrection*

For my devotional today I’m going to start in an unlikely place; I know some of you are hoping for more about Prickles and I will get to sheep eventually, but I must start with the Economist, that’s right, with the Economist, possibly the world’s leading economic news journal and for over a century and a half a staunch supporter of the free market.

They called on the newly retired Central Banker of Great Britain and former Central banker of Canada Mark Carney to share his thoughts for a economic blue print for the years ahead in light of the Covid pandemic.

Carney, whose Doctoral thesis was written on the intrinsic goods of competition in the market place, who cut his teeth at Goldman Sachs, the world’s most prestigious hedge fund operator and whose policies during the Great Recession of 2008-09 are credited with helping Canada through the worst of that crisis relatively unscathed, said some astounding things:

He started by noting that in the past few decades, the market economy has become the market society, no real shocker there, but it becomes stark when one of the world’s foremost economists admits that everything has become monetized.

We can’t even post videos without wondering what ads will be attracted to our website or FB accounts. Moms show off cute pictures of their children on Instagram and…horribly to my mind, if they garner “enough views,” they get ad revenue! Even a mother’s affection for her children is now a monetary opportunity!

Carney then says the words many thoughtful people never thought they’d hear a central banker say, “the economy must yield to human values!” We’re coming to realize, he goes on to say, that there are no “mere workers” but that no one can enjoy their lives without a recognition that everyone is valuable and does work that matters!

We’re going to see, he predicts, governments and companies that share thrive, and companies and governments that protect their self-interest by hoarding and using, decline.

Now I do think his evaluation seriously underestimates the human proclivity that we have to try to dominate each other, but I find his words also encouraging. I find them encouraging because what he merely hopes for as an ideal, the real world, the real world of actual communities have and are experiencing these ideals. Exhibit A is our first text this week!

A community that forms around sharing, around valuing the contributions of every other person, a community that is empowered by human values, or, better, the values of the one who called himself the Son of Man or as some translations have it, the Human One.

We see in this description of the beginning church, that our greatest ideals can actually not just be ideas but a life! And what we find here is no “early communism,” no “everyone gets exactly the same regardless of effort” but a genuine valuing that was born of love, the love of Christ that yields a love for each other.

Here is an instance of how Resurrection Life, the New Creation that we celebrate in our Greatest Festival begins to appear inside the structures and values of this present age.

And frankly, without these historical instances of communities that are living out the New Creation, the Resurrection would be like some weird one-off with no historical precedent and nothing to show for it!

If New Creation has broken into the present age in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, if indeed he is the Lord, then we would expect that there would be instances of his values, the values of the Human One, now fully participating in God’s Abundant Life, to manifest among us; in other words and to say it bluntly, to make a difference in the world we presently experience.

This text, which forms the foundation of our baptismal covenant, serves as a constant invitation to us! I was going to say challenge, and that’s right as well. But invitation is better for challenge can sound like something for those who are specially gifted, who have trained for a long time, maybe something for the professionals, for deacons, priests and bishops but that would be to get things backwards.

But invitation suggests that this community stands before us not as an impossible ideal but as an opportunity to say “yes.”

And that we can do because, our “yes” isn’t merely positive thinking but a response to a living presence, it’s the yes of a relationship initiated by Christ himself. The gospel reading for today is really a riff on the famous Psalm 23. But here, Jesus himself is standing in for the Lord!

“I am the gate.” I think of Prickles the sheep, for seven years there was no one to open a gate. But then someone saw him and opened the gate and now, freshly shorn, Prickles lies in green pastures.

But I don’t mean to romanticize. It’s not as if, like prickles, we can manage on our own. Indeed the only reason prickles didn’t die is that she lives in Tasmania, an island at the end of the world without predators that would have her for lunch. In North America, prickles would have ended her life as the chopped mutton sandwich of some larger creature.

Carney’s article suffers from a similar romantic view of human nature. How, I wonder did a market economy become a market society? It happened because “human values” are often not “the values of the Human One.” It happened because the metaphorical thief tramples on human lives in opposition to God who desires for every human being abundant Life!

The invitation to become the kind of community pictured in Acts, the invitation to enter the gate of abundant living that stands always ready to be opened is met by voices and actions that seek to keep us from saying “yes,” from accessing the abundant life that is on offer.

We need to recognize that the voices that would seek to pull us towards fear, towards selfish individualism, climb over the fence as it were, to invade our space, they are loud and brash, clamouring for our attention.

But the voice of the shepherd says gently, “here is the way of life, walk in it.” He leaves the choice to us and yet he empowers us by way of promise, if you say “yes” the gate will open, it’s not a mirage, a mere chimera. You will know the power of resurrection not as a past event but as present reality!

The Bible’s message is most powerfully encountered by people who feel the reality of evil in and around them. Our second reading was addressed to slaves who were suffering brutally as a result of their slavehood, but possibly because they dared to put their hope in different Master. But even here, especially here! The promise of Resurrection is offered

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins (all they have to do is say “yes”) we might live for righteousness (even slaves can help put the world to rights!) by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls (even slaves invited to enter through the gate and participate in abundant living!).

During this pandemic, are we not learning that economics and theology are related, are we not being called to re-evaluate a market society and heed the call back to a human society?

Are we not, as the Church, called to engage with our society, daring to believe, daring to say, “no, we don’t have all the answers and we’re willing to learn together with everyone, but if you’re looking for where we should land, what human society might yet look like, if you’re looking for promise in the midst of chaos, let me tell you about Easter the community that began in it’s wake, let me tell you about the Risen Human One and the values he’s inviting us into.

Amen.