

*For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at the last he will stand upon the earth.
And after my skin has been thus destroyed,
yet in my flesh I shall see God.*

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For those of you who are paying attention to such things, you know that the NHL playoffs are now well underway. And for those of you who are not paying attention, I'm happy to report that the Toronto Maple Leafs won their first round series last weekend.

Several of you have been kind enough of late to mention that to me; so I know that at least some of you are rejoicing about that!

And, as we might imagine, the games are being contested with all of the usual intensity and passion: arenas filled with screaming and sometimes deeply anxious fans. And maybe some of you are doing much the same thing at home: screaming at the TV when the other team scores; or cheering loudly when your guys win.

If you're really a fan, this is an incredibly tense time of year: nervously staying up late to watch the games to the bitter end; or getting up early the next morning to catch the score. For some, maybe it's all about seeing a well-played game, regardless of the score. But for many, it's definitely all about the score; desperately, maybe even a bit fearfully, hoping that your team scores more than the other one. Maybe even in some cases caring little how they do it as long as they win. By hook or by crook; by mayhem or madness. Just as long as they win.

Which shouldn't really surprise us because that's pretty much the way that the world works, isn't it? Get what you can get before the other guy gets it first.

We saw something of that three years ago at the start of the pandemic didn't we; when people chose to hoard the strangest of things; like toilet paper, for example; all because of some instinctive, deep-seated, fear that they might not get what others were getting.

And we see it from time to time in other ways, don't we; when, for example, we choose to close our hearts to the marginalised or poor or the mentally ill; or refugees and exiles.

And we see it in other moments of fear and anger; when we turn on those whom we imagine to be a threat to us or to our way of life. Not always. Not every situation. Not every relationship. But all too often; and maybe more commonly than we'd like to admit.

Which is why humanity lives as fearfully as we do. Because we can never be sure that someone isn't waiting in the shadows to take advantage of us; to get ahead of us; to step in line in front of us. You better look out for yourself, as the old saying goes, because no one else is going to do it for you.

And because humanity lives so fearfully, it seems essential that we have to stand up for ourselves; to defend ourselves, and to protect those we love; to use whatever weapons we have to stand up for ourselves, even when there's no real threat at all.

It happens everywhere. Maybe we remember school yard taunting or bullying. But it's just as common in the workplace. Or in families.

Fearfully turning on those who stand in our way. Or we imagine are standing in our way. Fighting our way every day because that's what the world teaches us to do. Living fearfully because we never know what tomorrow might bring.

But what if there's another way? What if we already knew the score? What if we knew before it happened what tomorrow is going to bring? If we already knew that our team had won, for example. If we knew for sure before the game had finished that we'd been victorious.

That's what we see in the incredibly amazing words of Job that formed this week's Old Testament lesson:

*I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at the last he will stand upon the earth.
And after my skin has been thus destroyed,
yet in my flesh I shall see God.*

In the midst of a world of pain, in the midst of a life filled with more sorrow and more grief and more hardship and more heartache than we could ever possibly imagine, Job has a vision of a better day; a vision of that day when he would stand with his redeemer: unbroken, un-condemned; a day of hope in a world filled with fear.

It's as if for Job all of the dark clouds of his sad and bitter life had been suddenly pulled back, if only for a moment, and he was allowed to see the bright glory of salvation.

Now as followers of Jesus Christ we know that as the Day of Resurrection.

As we proclaim each and every time that we say the Creed.

We know that as the day when we will see the Risen Christ in all of his majesty and glory and power; a day when all suffering and all pain and all fear and all sorrow and all grief will be lifted from us, forever and for always. That day when Christ's victory will become our victory, for all eternity.

And because, like Job, we've been given a vision of that day, we no longer have to live the fearful, scrambling, scratching life of a fallen, broken, world.

That's why James speaks in this week's Epistle of how we can be 'quick to listen' and 'slow to speak'.

Because we don't have to just give up and surrender ourselves to the bitter and divided, angry and anxious world in which we live.

We already know who wins! We already know the score!

So imagine, if you can, how many things in our past we might have changed if we'd known at the start what we learned along the way; If we'd known beforehand what the hope of Resurrection teaches us.

Imagine the mistakes that we could have avoided. The harsh and bitter words that we might never have said. The things that we did or said or thought out of fear or anger; all because we just didn't know.

That's what Resurrection means for us. Witnessing by the patience of our hearts; witnessing to our sure and certain hope that God has prepared something better for us. Knowing that we've already won, not just a hockey game but the game of life, because Jesus is risen from the dead; and only because Jesus is risen from the dead! And starting to live that better way, starting to live that resurrected way, that risen life, right now.