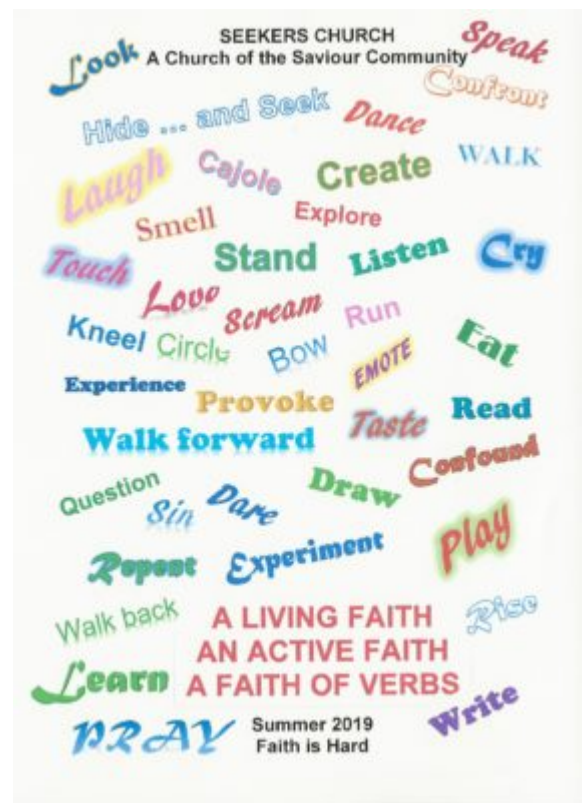


“Waiting for the Resurrection” by Tomás Rodríguez

August 18, 2019



The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Thank you very much for the invitation to give this sermon. Initially I was wondering, who am I to give the sermon? With the reluctance of those of us who know we are unworthy, I said to myself, “If they trust me to do so, there will be some reason from God.” And when I read today’s readings, I realized that I have something important to say, at least to myself. My family is a witness that I am too shy to talk about the things of God, and they have always complained to me about that. But let’s get started.

The first reading is from the prophet Isaiah, specifically from the first Isaiah, which occurs in the context of a

social-political boom under the rule of King Ozías [Uzziah]. According to the book of 2 Kings, it was a time of splendor, of domination of other nations, of great construction, of economic bonanza, of expansion of agriculture. The vineyard had been taken care of by God, it had received all the necessary care to bear fruit, but the fruits were not as expected. Instead of justice the iniquity was generated, the poor were neglected, there were pomp, waste, luxury, and excess; even rites were copied from other cultures for other gods. The people who had been liberated from Egypt, and who had lived in abundance after that, did not bear fruit.

On July 19, 1979, 40 years ago, the people of Nicaragua were liberated from the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza, the last of a dynasty that ruled more than 30 years in Nicaragua and that remained in power by repressing the opposition. That July 19, with the FSLN, the guerrilla who fought against Somoza, Nicaragua and many other Latin American countries had hope; it was a sign that change was possible. We left Egypt; we believed that a new society and a new humanity was emerging, fairer and more egalitarian. This project ended in 1990 as a result of its own mistakes, for not being able to understand the discontents of the people, and also because of the political and economic isolation to which it was subjected.

In 2007 the FSLN came to power again, with the promise of not making the same mistakes. Nicaragua began a new era of economic growth with the support of Venezuelan oil. Nicaragua had the highest growth rate in Central America and the second highest in Latin America. The investment increased, the government and the private investors had an alliance that seemed unwavering, there was even a reduction in poverty, and the projections of general equilibrium models indicated that the millennium development goals could be reached in Nicaragua. But the political system was becoming corrupted, power began to focus on the president's family, justice was exclusive to party members, wealth was concentrated in a few

hands, and the inequality grew. It was the mud-footed idol doomed to disappear. Those people blessed with the liberation had fallen again into the dictatorship—a dictatorship that, to maintain power, needs human sacrifices, the deaths of young people who rise in protest on the streets of Nicaragua.

Consider the United States as a vineyard, which is having economic growth and the lowest unemployment rates in recent years. Is it bearing the expected fruit? Is there a decline in inequality and poverty? Is there more justice? I believe that these questions should serve as a measure of the success of any political-economic system.

Today's gospel is perhaps one of the most provocative for Christians; some people would like to ignore it. Many of us seek in religion peace, love, harmony, tranquility, to be able to reach communion with our brothers and sisters far from all conflict. But this gospel tells us that Jesus brings us division, division even in homes. But it is not a Manichaean division between good and evil, between hero and villain, between left and right. It is not an ideological division; it is an existential division between life and death. Between projects of life and projects of death.

We currently have governments like Ortega's and Maduro's or Bolsonaro's and Trump's, governments that are ideologically opposed between right and left, but all of them share a populist model of discrimination, inequality, and death. The conflict is whether you're in favor of life or you're not. A young Nicaraguan man committed to the Blue and White cause (the Nicaraguan flag colors, symbols of the opposition to Ortega) and who lives in the United States told us that he is planning to travel to Nicaragua but he is not planning to see his father because his father is in favor of the regime. That is the division that exists in Nicaragua, between father and son, between brothers and sisters; that is the division of which the gospel speaks to us.

The next question the gospel raises is, to what extent do we shy away from conflict? To what extent do we become blind to the signs of the times? The signs are in front of us and we don't want to see them, perhaps due to fear of that division.

In Nicaragua, we saw peasants, feminist women, LGBTIQ groups, and environmentalists being ignored and discriminated against. They even suffered violence by a political system that already reflected its dictatorial essence, but hypocritically we did not want to see them. We considered them to be marginal minorities, extremist minorities, who did not look at the progress generated by the system. We didn't read the signs.

Now, here in the United States, we see signs: children separated from their parents locked in cages, dirty from their own excrement, mass murders in the name of racial segregation, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the denial of climate change. These are facts that cannot be concealed by post-truth; they do not allow ideological interpretation. Are we able to read these signs and face the conflict?

I have left the second reading to the end of the sermon on purpose because it is the clear consequence of the above. We have faith in a resurrected one, in someone who was victorious over death, and not just death, but death on the cross. We have faith in someone who was tortured, someone who died as a result of those tortures, and we have faith in that one who was flagged as a criminal for opposing the established power at that time. We are followers of Jesus Christ in a world full of conflict, where life is opposed to death. The person of faith will inevitably face slander, exile, persecution, and death. To aspire to something better, to the resurrection of Christ, we will have to pass through the cross.

Over 325 dead, over 800 political prisoners, over 80,000 exiles. These are the numbers that the fight against the dictatorship in Nicaragua leave as a result. The fight for life leads to persecution, imprisonment, exile, and death.

But to better understand what we're talking about, I'm going to mention a case. I know a woman who believed in a revolutionary process from her childhood, who aspires to eradicate poverty and inequality. Because of her academic merits, she was given an important position in one of the main institutions of the government and she happened to have some political power in that institution. She used to live in an economically comfortable situation. She did not become rich, but she had economic slack. When the protests broke out in Nicaragua and the first demonstrators were killed, this woman was challenged by reality. The values that she had lived for and her Christian faith led her to oppose the violence of the state, and the project of death.

This woman was afraid (and she still is afraid). She knew that, by the fact of resigning from her political position, she would face repercussions for her life and so would her family; but, despite her fear, she resigned. Her Christian values and the example to her daughters were more important than the comfort offered to her by the regime. The consequences soon came: she started receiving death threats, persecution, and defamation, which pushed her to end up in exile. That woman is my wife. Now we are waiting for the resurrection in a better Nicaragua.