

Grace and Peace from God our Father and Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Over the years I've sat at the death bed of too many people. For a few lucky one's death comes quietly in the night, but for most death involves struggle for everyone in the room. These days with modern medicine the physical pain of the dying can be eased, but mourning, crying and the pain of loss always make an appearance at the bedside. Fear, struggle, tears, loneliness, even anger and regret usually make an appearance of some sort, and can overwhelm those in the room.

No matter how many people may be there or how well loved ones have prepared themselves, death isolates us. No one can accompany the dying on that journey, and though those left behind share a common loss. We find ourselves alone – completely lost in a grief entirely our own – *exiled* from those we want most to comfort and be comforted by because they are lost in their own grief.

(PAUSE)

John gazed sadly out over the endless waves. The waves that separated him from everyone else. The sea had become his prison, the guard that kept him captive, isolated from his friends, his life and work. He was cut off from his brothers and sisters, those very communities of Christians who were surrounded themselves by a sea of people who pressured them to denounce their Lord and His Kingdom, and worship Emperor Diocletian.

For his faithfulness and ministry to his risen Lord, John had been arrested, tried, convicted, and given the most severe sentence possible, short of death – Exile. He was to spend the rest of his life imprisoned on the island of Patmos – alone, save the roman guards whose presence certified his exile.

It is to John on the Island of Patmos that the visions of Revelation came as he stood that day in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. To this very isolated disciple, to this man who has been imprisoned by the sea, in the midst of his exile comes a vision:

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more."(Rev. 21:1)

What a glorious vision for this man who lived each day alone. This would not be all that there is. The sea which kept him captive and alone would be no more, and the former things with all their pain, loneliness, and anguish would pass away. But that is not the full extent of the vision. For to this man who spends all his days in silence without the company of others comes a voice:

"Behold, God's dwelling place is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them as their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away." "Behold, I make all things new."(Rev. 21:3-4)

What a wondrous message in the midst of his silent world to be spoken – that his exile will be overcome, overcome with a new

community of believers gathered around God's presence himself. All exiles, the exile of sorrow and tears, pain and sickness, death and mourning – will be overcome.

Who can speak this message from the throne, but the One, Jesus Christ, who has been in exile – who in exile on the CROSS identified himself with all of us who endure the exile of human sorrow and tears, pain and sickness, death and mourning. For he has endured the exile unto death and has triumphed over the power of sinfulness, sickness, and death.

Jesus Christ is risen, and it is He who has broken the back of sin and death and the devil. He is the first and the only one who speaks from beyond the exile – for sin and brokenness, death and mourning and all the devils wiles and ways have no more dominion over Him. Jesus Christ is Lord, "in charge," and speaks from the throne. Rejection and shame no longer rule our future, the risen Christ does. Pain and sickness no longer rule our future, the Risen One does, death and mourning no longer rule our future, He does – for He is Risen.

This is the visions that John received on the island of Patmos, but it is a word that has been spoken to each of us as we were brought from the exile of this world into the community of faith in Baptism. Named, Claimed, signed, and sealed our Lord speaks to us in Baptism saying: *"Behold, I make all things new."*

In a few moments the very same water that imprisoned John in exile on Patmos, will be used in Holy Baptism to free Deckland and

_____ from our exile from God. The same water that surrounded John, ensuring his isolation on Patmos, will surround Deckland and _____ inviting our newly baptized brother and sister to live in God's presence.

In this water, God empowers us through the gift of the Holy Spirit to leave behind the isolation imposed on us by the world and ourselves, and give ourselves over to loving and serving God's people and our neighbors. God invites us to be made new, and follow where Jesus Christ has led the way. Even as we remain imprisoned in a world of selfishness, God invites us to live free as we serve our Lord without thought to ourselves.

As a sign that our exile has been overcome and that our Lord reigns, we live as a community of love reaching out to those who are in exile: those cry in hospitals, live in loneliness, sit in the darkness of grief, suffer from addiction, hunger, or despair. We are a community of self-giving love which will not let crying, or death or pain separate us from each other because we know those things have been defeated by our Risen Christ.

AMEN !!!