

Sermon: Easter Vigil

The Rev. Mike Wernick

March 26, 2016

Year C

Genesis 1:1 - 2:2

Ps. 36:5-10

Exodus 14:10 - 15:1a

Canticle 8

Isaiah (4:2-3, 5-6)

Ps. 122

Zephaniah 3:12-20

Psalm 126

At the Eucharist

Psalm 114

Romans 6:3-11

Luke 24:1-12

You've all heard the stories... like... when I had that car accident last spring... they say I died... but I saw my grandparents... and some other relatives... and they welcomed me... and ushered me through a tunnel towards the light... and I was in a place that must have been Heaven... but a voice said it wasn't time for me to be there yet... and the next moment... I remember being lifted up into an ambulance and being taken to the hospital...

Or... When I was driving up north in Canada last summer... a million miles from nowhere... so dark you couldn't see your hand in front of your face... I got lost on some mountain road... and when I stopped to look at a map... through a clearing in the trees... I saw something hovering in the sky... something round with a bulge in the middle... and lights all around it... and all of a sudden... it shot off towards the mountain and was gone faster than you'd think anything could fly...

Or those from scripture... then a voice came from heaven... *I have glorified it and I will glorify it again...* the crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder... others said... *an angel has spoken to him...* Jesus answered: *this voice has come not for my sake, but for yours...*

And then there's tonight's story... the women came from the tomb... and told the eleven that when they went to anoint Jesus' body... the stone was rolled away... and the tomb

was empty... and two men in dazzling clothes appeared and asked them why they were looking for the living among the dead... they said he is risen just as he said he would be when he was in Galilee... but these words seemed to the eleven like an idle tale... and they did not believe them...

People tell stories... and some listeners scoff at them... and others trust and believe... people tell stories... and some of them think it's the sound of thunder... and others think it's the voice of an angel... people tell stories... and some think they're idle tales... while others run to see for themselves... not only because they want to believe... but because something about it resonates within them... but sometimes doubt is stronger...

Michael Brown... the Academic Dean at Payne Theological Seminary wrote... less than a century ago... women and people of color were not considered credible witnesses in American courts... the history of civil rights in the United States is replete with examples of women and men whose truthfulness was discounted or disregarded because an accident of birth made them something other than white men... In short, certain people throughout history... simply because of gender or ethnicity... have been branded deceitful and lacking in credibility for no other reason than prevailing social prejudices... as St. Augustine wrote in one of his sermons... *Truth became like an idle tale.*

Like the women at the tomb, when we proclaim the powerful experience of the resurrection... we put ourselves in a precarious situation... our claim may be questioned... but the deeds that flow from our claim provide the support for the truthfulness of what has happened in our lives. God's Yes to Jesus... is as perplexing and mysterious to us... as it was to those women on that Sunday morning... they spoke their truth even if it was to disbelieving ears... and they did not let uncertainty rule their lives...

Albert Einstein however... did let uncertainty rule his life... he hated the possibility that electrons could be in two places at the same time... but he was wrong... just a few

years ago... two quantum physicists proved that they could be... and won the Nobel Prize... it sounds preposterous that electrons and atoms can be in many different states at the same time... but it's the basis of things like lasers... computers... and the internet... all based on quantum physics...

And I've seen that photograph from inside one of the particle accelerators... of one subatomic particle... of one particle in two places at the same time... not a double exposure... not time lapse photography... but one thing existing in two places at the same time... this reality... takes away our certainty... so if we can't be certain about just where an electron is at any given moment... then what else do we believe is impossible... but is really true... and what might we think is true but turns out not to be...

I've had some experiences that have made me wonder... times when I thought I knew something... but ended up doubting my own experience... one time... someone told me that another person I knew was moving away... and when I saw that other person... I said *Oh I'll be sad to see you move away*... and they said... what are you taking about... I'm not going anywhere... and I wondered whether the first person had actually said that... or whether I was crazy... whether I had imagined it... but why would I imagine that... I remembered feeling sad when I heard it... but why would I feel sad unless it was in response to what I'd been told... we got to the bottom of it... but I had doubted my own experience and should not have at all... and I've also experienced people doing and saying things that I would never have dreamed possible...

When someone is baptized... we call it a sacrament... an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace... we take some water... and bless it together in community... and dunk them or pour it on them... in the name of the Father... and of the Son... and of the Holy Spirit... and there is change... something changes... we may not have the tools to measure it... but the change is there just the same... I mean... when we forgive someone a wrong done us... it may be hard to measure... but we

know that our hearts are changed... when we graduate college... or begin a new career... or enter into a new relationship... something changes... it may be hard to measure... it may even be hard to describe... but we know we are changed...

When someone is baptized into community... the public confession that we are part of something much bigger than we are... changes us... when we are baptized into the death and resurrection of a consciousness that is the foundation for all of creation... and remember that *through him all things came into being*... our new identity is formed not out of impermanence... but out of permanence... not out of change... but out of changelessness... when we are baptized with life giving water... we gain eternal life...

There was a change too at Jesus' incarnation... all who heard about it wondered at the things which the shepherds told them... Mary treasured all the things she heard and pondered them in her heart... and the shepherds went back... glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen... just as had been told them...

So if something can exist in two or more states in the same moment... if Jesus can be both human and divine in the same moment... then even though the mystery of the resurrection may challenge every logical and rational fiber in our being... we also realize that it doesn't have to make sense here [head]... because it just makes sense here [heart]...

And who knows... if we can photograph two states of a subatomic particle... then perhaps one day... someone will win a Nobel Prize for designing a machine that measures changes in the human heart... or that lets us experience what someone else has experienced... so we know for ourselves that it's so...

But for now... perhaps we can simply learn not to doubt our own experiences... perhaps we can learn to favor the feelings we know to be real even when our head says they can't be... and perhaps we can all be credible witnesses to what we have seen and

heard... how Jesus has changed our lives... even when it makes no sense at all... and to proclaim it... loudly... even when others may doubt us... especially when we say: Alleluia... Christ is Risen... [pause]... Happy Easter!

Mike+