

# Sermon: Easter

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Year C

Isaiah 65:17-25

Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24

Acts 10:34-43

John 20:1-18

When I was in seminary... and we talked about preaching... what sometimes rose to the top... what sometimes seemed crucial... was preaching on Christmas and Easter... there are apparently... vast hordes of people who come to church on only these two days... C + E Christians they called them... and it was important to prepare a good sermon for them... since it may have been all they heard all year...

And when given only two opportunities... just two opportunities... each year... to share the Gospel... the Good News of God in Christ... well many of us in preaching class felt the heat of pressure... the high expectation to deliver life changing messages... it seemed a difficult and daunting task... but I added my own special piece to it... I brought my own difficulty... as a friend once told me years ago... I tended to make things more complicated than they needed to be... maybe too complicated... settle down Michael... they said... take a breath... all will be well...

But it is complicated.... isn't it... our minds struggle to understand how this God-man... who showed us how to live... who was crucified by Imperial Rome... and died... was raised from the dead so he could offer us eternal life... it's complicated because we really don't understand from where... or just how... life comes in the first place... we know how we humans create life... in some limited way we understand that Spirit animates us... but in John 10:18 Jesus says... *No one takes my life from me... but I lay it down of my own accord... I have power to lay it down... and I have power to take it up again... I have received this command from my Father...* but who among us... before being born... made a conscious decision to incarnate... not that I can remember...

It seems complicated... but it's also simple... God doesn't need or want us to be concerned with the complicated parts... but only to enjoy the gift of life... and the simplicity of it...

But maybe what gets in the way of the simplicity of it... the truth of it... are all of the cultural ideas and images we have of rising from the dead... all the bad ideas and images from books and movies... about vampires... Frankenstein... zombies... the undead... stories which by themselves... are impossible to believe... so we make lists... the believable and the unbelievable... what we can verify... from what's too fantastic to consider... and last evening... we talked about hard-to-believe idle tales... and whether believing them depends on who the teller is... or not...

And the stone is moved... and there is running... and telling... and there is running back to the tomb... and there is bending down and looking but not going in... and there is going in... and leaving... and then there is Mary... seeing two angels sitting where Jesus had been lying... and there was weeping... [maybe like when Jesus wept for Lazarus]... you see when someone we love... who is innocent of any wrongdoing... is taken and given a mock trial and killed... weeping is a pretty sensible response...

But the narrative describes so much action... so much activity... so much *doing*... it really doesn't describe any *being*... and that may be why Mary doesn't recognize Jesus... doesn't re-cognize him... maybe his voice sounded different... or maybe in a way we can't understand... he is changed... that may be why he says: *Do not hold on to me*... it's only when he calls her by name... that their relationship is restored...

Episcopal Bishop Wayne Houghland told the story... about how the very day after his consecration... he visited the Grace Sudanese congregation here in town... and he said he didn't know why he said this... but when he began to speak... the first thing out of his mouth to these people was: *I see you*... in parts of Africa... there's a greeting... *Sawu bona*... which means: *I see you*... I see you... like Shalom... it means more than just

hello... it means: I see your personality... I see your humanity... I see your dignity and respect... in the African village context... where everyone knows one another... it's an exceedingly powerful representation of understanding... and when Wayne said that... some people responded... *Sikhona*... I am here... and as I looked into that some... one author commented that the order of the exchange is important... until you see me... I do not exist... it's as if... *when* you see me... you bring me into existence... something related to quantum physics... in the Sudanese context... in which Fr. Zechariah was one of the Lost Boys... this was a powerful exchange...

And I think this is how Jesus and Mary were reconciled... a gardener who could not have known her... revealing that he did... named her... saw her... brought her back into existence... you could say... brought her back to her self... recognizing herself in her relationship with Jesus as Teacher...

Easter Sunday is complicated... and simple... we may not understand the complicated part... how God turns death into life... but the simple part is easy... it's just seeing each other... knowing not just the victories we share... but the challenges we face too... and in all of that... feeling seen and understood... and loved... not because we're perfect... but because we're not... [as some of you experienced me last evening]...

Many of you confide in me from time to time about the challenges you face... in health... or finance... or family... or faith... and because I've been on that road in my own ways... we are the same... *Sawu bona*... *I see you*... and we are loved the same by God in Christ... not because we're perfect... but because we're not... and we are given a share in resurrected life... but it's not just something for later on... I think it's something we experience regularly...

Over and over again... we have one opportunity after another to let go of what holds us back and embrace what brings us forward... to let go of what brings death and embrace what brings life... from the most obvious... to the most subtle... it's why I once wrote

that Jesus turned resurrection from a historical event... into an eternal state of being that's available to us in each and every moment... so we can move farther away from any thing... or behavior... or thought which kills us... and move closer to and embrace the abundant life Jesus came to give us... I found new life when my family moved from Long Island to New Jersey... I found new life when I learned to drive and got a car... I was reborn when my daughter was born... and when I converted to Christianity and was baptized... I was given new life in my relationship with Joel... in being able to pursue ordination... and in accepting the call to serve you... and each and every one of you are given new life in the changes and opportunities that arise in your lives... it more a matter of how we see them... of how we are named and called back to our selves...

It's understandable and easy to get caught up in tragedies like the bombings in Brussels this week... or the craziness of this political cycle... or the water crisis in Flint... [someone here must know someone there]... but it's easy for us to default to division and accusation... but it reminds us over and over that this is not what God created us for... that we are called to reject any rhetoric that creates an idol out of power and privilege... or the notion that we can ensure the safety of some by sacrificing the hopes of others... we are called to reject any ancient or modern tribalism which divides... or the divisions themselves which are lies... but to embrace unity over uniformity... togetherness over sameness...

For many of us... today's focus will be on family and friends... on travel... on visiting... on phone calls... on food... maybe a ham... maybe some TV... but certainly on chocolate eggs or rabbits... there will be a lot of doing... but let's also ask ourselves how we can just be... how we can see the empty tomb... be reminded that Jesus has gone on ahead of us...and follow him... ask re-cognize him... so that we too can say *Sawu bona*... I see you... Happy Easter!

Mike+