

Sermon: Easter 2

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April 28, 2019

Year C
Acts 5:27-32
Psalm 150
Revelation 1:4-8
John 20:19-31

St. John Chrysostom said that *feeding the hungry is greater work... than raising the dead...* I think this must mean that it's easier to raise the dead... than it is to make sure that there are no more hungry mouths to feed...

In a 2007 movie interview... The Rev. Dr. Laurence Keene said... *there's nothing wrong with a fifth-grade understanding of God – as long as you're in the fifth grade...* I think this must mean if we want to consider ourselves to be... grown up... emotionally healthy... and spiritually mature... then we must also embrace a grown up understanding of scripture... how it speaks to us now... and its place in our lives now...

The prophet Ezekiel wrote in the 6th century BCE... during the Babylonian Exile... and because he is a character in his own prophecies... it helps to interpret his actions in a symbolic manner... in Ch. 3... God said to Ezekiel... *Mortal... feed your stomach and fill your belly with this scroll that I give you... and I ate it... and it tasted as sweet as honey to me...* I don't think this means that Ezekiel literally ate rolled up paper... but that he read... learned... and inwardly digested God's Word... whose truth was sweet... and whose truth transcends culture and society...

But then God said... *I send you to the House of Israel... but they will refuse to listen to you... they refuse to listen to Me... for the whole House of Israel are stubborn of heart... but I will make your face as hard as theirs... I will make your forehead like adamant... harder than flint... so do not fear them... and do not be dismayed by them... because I will turn their hearts of stone... into hearts of flesh...* I think this must mean that we are capable of being transformed...

John Dominic Crossan... a Roman Catholic priest... said... *it's not that ancient people told literal stories... and we're now smart enough to take them symbolically... but that they told symbolic stories... and we're now dumb enough to take them literally...* I think this must mean... that if we're to grow into the full stature of Christ... we need to take on the really difficult work of letting go of ancient tribal notions that pit our understanding of scripture against other understandings... our denomination against other denominations... our religion against other religions... we must engage the difficult work... of converting literal understandings which are bound by time and space... into symbolic truths which we can eat like scrolls... and which are sweet truth in all times and in all places...

Because as Bp. Satterlee said on Ascension Day 2016... we have enshrined in time... what really exists out of time... and because we've enshrined it in time... we have also unintentionally enshrined it in space... but after men have gone to the moon... after Voyager and other spacecraft have explored and photographed the solar system... and after the Hubble telescope has peered countless light years away... and also backwards in time... and no one has seen Jesus in Heaven sitting at the right hand of God... perhaps we must understand words like these... in a different way...

The Rev. Mike Kinman writes... the key question for John's Gospel... written after the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD... one of the most basic questions... is... where does God live... now that the Temple is destroyed... where is Jesus... after the resurrection... John's answer is that God dwells in the midst of the community... the text says that... *Jesus stood among them...* but the Greek is more accurately rendered as... *Jesus was in their midst...* this strongly suggests that in spite of anything else... the disciples also had a spiritual realization of Christ... that his presence emerged from within them too... subduing their panic... and bringing peace... the peace he had promised...

You know... our binary minds lean towards either/or thinking... either the disciples encountered a resuscitated corpse... or someone made it all up... but maybe they

encountered an imperishable body... as mentioned in 1 Corinthians... and we just don't know what to make of that... it defies our neatly defined boundaries...

So *Seeing the Lord*... the joy the disciples felt... and the reason this joy cannot be taken away... is that it is at least grounded in a spiritual presence that is not subject to loss... the way a perishable... physical presence is... and this joy that no one can take from you... reflects a peace the world cannot give... *seeing the Lord*... then... is knowing the revelation of Christ... at such a depth... that one's life is changed...

And because Jesus' glorification happened on the cross... and because he is interiorly united to the Father... the proof of his presence... are his wounds... his death reveals a greater flow of life than was previously known... and this flow is symbolized by the lancing of his side... from which flowed blood and water... blood and water... which flow in birth... and just as Eve emerged from Adam's side... so divine life is received and understood through the symbols that mediate his love... that he lays down his life for his friends...

Unlike Luke's account of Pentecost... fifty days later... on this same Easter day that the women found the tomb empty... on this same Easter evening... Jesus gives them his peace a second time... and breathes the Holy Spirit not just onto them... but INTO them... just as God breathed new life INTO the earth creature Adam... and so with the Temple destroyed... they are now a new creation... embodying and channeling... the living presence of God...

And though our text says... *if you forgive the sins of any... they are forgiven them... if you retain the sins of any... they are retained*... the faith community is not to be the arbiter of right or wrong... though we are to bear unceasing witness... through our commission... to the love of God in Jesus... and it is in choosing or rejecting this relationship with God... that our sins are either forgiven or retained...

And so we come to Thomas... a week later... the first day of the week... like the first day of creation... Thomas is with them... is part of the community... and it is through community that he will experience the risen Christ... and Shea points out... that although Jesus uses words similar to what Thomas said was essential for him to believe... Jesus is not complying with Thomas' demand... Jesus is encouraging Thomas to reach for the divine life that flows through him... it plays upon a line from Genesis 3:22... *What if the man should stretch out his hand... and take from the tree of life... and eat... and live forever!*

Jesus is asking Thomas to reach out and live forever... and Thomas must have put out his hand... for his cry of... *My Lord and my God*... signals not only the reception of divine life... but the recognition that Jesus and the Father are One... the message of this Gospel then... is that believing is not a matter of physical observation alone... but of realizing a spiritual truth... that's why Jesus says... *Blessed are those who have not seen... and yet have come to believe...*

And the word that John uses for believe... is the Greek word *pisteos*... which is... in my opinion... really better translated as trust... it's the difference between embracing an intellectual concept that may be light years beyond our ability to comprehend... and trusting someone enough... to put your whole life in their hands...

And in our baptisms... we were asked whether we... *put our whole trust... in Christ's grace and love*... and every one of us said... I do... so what does it mean... when we make that vow... as people... and as community... and what does it mean when we sometimes trust ourselves more...

So must we try over and over again to raise the dead... when it's so much easier to just feed the hungry... must we hold on to understandings which do not change... even as we ourselves change... must we eat rolled up paper... when God just wants to feed us

with God's Word... must we take symbolic stories with multiple meanings... and whittle them down so they have just one literal meaning...

Or can we call out to God from our narrowness... and hear God's answer as a vast expanse... and can we trust in those things which we cannot hold... or into which we cannot put our hands... like grace... and glory... and forgiveness... and love... and can we let go of that which is bound in time and space... and hold on to the divine... which knows no time or space... and can we just finally Be not Afraid... after all... that is the life... into which Jesus calls us... Holy God... help us in our unbelief...

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