

Easter Sunday, Year C  
Luke 24: 1-12  
4-8-2007

Focus Statement: What does the Resurrection mean to us?

Easter, one of our “high holidays”, children get new Spring outfits even if they have to wear them under their winter coats here in North Dakota, new white sandals for the girls slipped into after the boots come off, Easter egg hunts – do you suppose that tradition started when the disciples saw that Jesus was raised from the dead and they wondered where he was? I would welcome any information on how a rabbit, who brings and hides colored chicken eggs and candy, became associated with this most mysterious and solemn of days. I do know that it becomes intensely distracting from the contemplation of what Easter might really mean to us as individuals and as a community of believers.

As a result of having had the opportunity to be a delegate to the 2006 General Convention I now am on the Bishops and Deputies List serve. The best thing I have come across from reading all these commentaries happened around St Patrick’s day. I read a quote from William Butler Yeats which I paraphrase here “Being Irish, I have an abiding sense of the tragic which sustains me through temporary periods of Joy” being Irish myself, this quote has haunted me and last night I realized one of the reasons it does. Let me explain...

We have just spent a week contemplating the last days of Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer, the Son of God, the Paschal Lamb and the Prince of Peace who as our teacher gave us two commandments; one to love God and the next to love one another as we are loved by God. Through scripture readings, this week, we have heard the story, our story, about Jesus being misunderstood, abused and finally crucified and now today the story of how God raised Jesus from the dead, death has been conquered, we have been saved, at least that is how we understand it from this historical distance. Let’s look again at today’s Gospel,... a group of women who have been devoted followers of Jesus approach his tomb with spices for the dead body of the man who had meant so much to them, this after all was the traditional role of women at that historical and cultural time. Women of their time who had chosen to follow a man who treated them as if they had value, as if, could it be, that he saw them as equal to the other disciples but now he is dead. One can only imagine the profound sorrow that gripped them as they waited out the Sabbath day, since they could not work on the Sabbath – we all remember the times Jesus got in trouble for healing on the Sabbath – no all they can do is wait in that suspended place that sorrow takes us, rethinking those last days, wondering how it had come to this unbearable loss. Then finally, the Sabbath was over and they could go to him – if only his body, to care for him one last time...but they get there and he is not there. Instead there were two men in dazzling clothes – angels no doubt – who helped them understand the teachings of Jesus – he was not speaking in metaphors no he really meant it all along when he said that he would have to die and that he would rise again on the third day. INCREDIBLE  
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They raced to the other disciples with their hearts no doubt bursting with this new realization. You can just see them breathlessly entering the room where the disciples were waiting for whatever might come next and telling them the entire story about their amazing encounter with the angels, about the body of Jesus not being in the tomb. But of course these disciples were not Jesus, these were men of the historical and cultural times who dismissed the women out of hand as telling an idle tale. Who would believe anything a woman had to say? Peter who decides to see for himself, goes off to the tomb and is amazed at what he sees, but he does not return to the other disciples instead we are told he goes home.

What strikes me about this passage from Luke's Gospel is that the very first attempt to communicate a new understanding of the teachings of Jesus by one human being to another, ended with the those people being totally dismissed. The women were trying to share that they had gone to the tomb, and the body of Jesus was not there but angels had appeared to them and shared with them, this deeper understanding of the very predictions made by Jesus. But the disciples could not see past their own understandings of the teachings of Jesus and their cultural prejudices about women. No it could not be believed that angels would have appeared to mere women.

I thought, well things haven't changed all that much in two thousand years. Jesus saw past cultural beliefs, he showed a marked preference for those in that society without power or status because he saw these people as his brothers and sisters as people out of his great compassion and maybe just maybe as people who would not try to "buy" his approval through their own works but as people who could only offer him their love in response to his love and compassion. He tried to teach and model this unlimited love and compassion to his followers and I would like to believe that some people "got it". I like to think that Stephen "got it" which is why he was chosen one of the people to help the poor and needy.

Today we continue to expend our energy fighting amongst ourselves about the appropriate way to interpret scripture, about the only appropriate way to have a marriage, some claiming that one man, one woman is the only way because it is the biblical way, it has nothing to do with culture. This of course overlooks that in most of the bible the practice of polygamy was the cultural norm, a norm that is no longer acceptable in many places in the world. One can always find a biblical text – at times out of context – to prove whatever you are arguing for – and I ask what is the point? Where is our love and compassion? Where is our service to one another? Maybe had we ended global poverty, overcome the diseases of this world, provided education to all those who desired it, lived in complete harmony with the physical world around us, maybe if there was peace throughout the world, we could have the leisure to debate some of these finer nuisances in the bible.

I know we are to spread the Good News of Christ but it seems terribly contradictory to do it when we ourselves have not learned yet how to walk the walk that goes with our talk. I am not saying we must do it perfectly but the headlines of the papers and the newscasts should be more filled with news on how we are living into our faith and less news of

bitter struggles for control. Then we might truly inspire others. One can't honestly teach others about the 'demon rum' while we hold our nightly cocktail. People will judge us by our actions not our words, even if our words attract them.

And so back to Yeats, I find that in many ways – if not all – I do have an abiding sense of the tragic when I consider the realities underlying the need for the Millennium Development goals, when I read, which I no longer do very often, the Bishops and deputies list serve and realize there is a great deal of talking and very little listening and not much hope in bridging the differences in the church, when I spend time trying to understand how to help the families and children with whom I work at PATH, when I look out at you, my church family and know how many of you have been hurt by the church. This sense of tragedy is the ever present background to those moments of Joy I experience when I am in the presence of people who deeply care for one another, when I hold the sweet innocence of a new baby, when I distribute the Eucharist knowing that the gift of the Eucharist can truly sustain us, when I hear the birds return and see the flowers push through the newly warmed soil. But, after these moments of joy, I am reminded of one of Sam's favorite buttons, which says, "If you're not outraged, you are not paying attention."

Today we celebrate the Really Good News, Jesus is Risen, let us embrace all that means for our lives, we are not left to our own devices, we are loved deeply by our God who understands our brokenness and is there to sustain us as we continue our journey in his footsteps, doing our part and letting the final results be in God's care. Alleluia