

“Now What?”

Mark 16:1-8

April 12, 2009

Easter Sunday

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Easter is the high holy day for Christians. Today is the day we focus all our attention on Christ whose life is not thwarted by the power of death. Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed. So, now what? The events of Holy Week ending on Easter morning is only the beginning of the 2nd part of the Jesus story. What follows Easter is the *sequel* to the historical Jesus. We've moved through “The Life & Times of Jesus on Earth” to “The Enduring Presence of God with us Known in Christ.” Every time I teach a confirmation class I explain that “Christ” is not Jesus' last name as in “Jesus Christ.” *Christ* is a Christological title. It is like Elizabeth, Queen of England. *Christ* elaborates in the language of faith what the historical Jesus means.

Now that Jesus the Christ is *incarnated* in this world, in creation, in our lives, in the church, what are we to do with this good news? As followers of Christ we try to do what he did, to be who he was/is, to teach what he taught, and what Jesus did with his life on this earth was to align his passions with the passions of God and God's dream for this world. Marcus Borg, who has studied Jesus all his life, says that in the simplest of terms, Jesus' life was devoted to loving God and changing the world. So, if we are to be like Jesus, then we love God and work to change the world into God's vision for it.

In Easter we see the promise that death cannot conquer life. John Buchanan, editor of *The Christian Century*, says that people come to church on Easter because they know what the topic is. He writes: “*A member of my congregation who died of AIDS a few years ago used to call it ‘the big one’: the reality of death and the power of death--and the power that triumphs over death. There is no tragedy that God cannot redeem, no loss that the Risen Christ cannot overcome, no dream--even the elusive dream of peace on earth--that the God who raised Jesus from the dead cannot energize and advice.*” With death all around us, young people killed by drunk drivers or war or senseless murders, Easter reminds us that death is not the final answer.

I have known Christians for whom Easter is a difficult day because they get caught up with what happened to Jesus' body as if that is the ultimate question of Easter. But in the Bible we read that the early Christians focused on their *experience* of the risen Christ. Throughout Christian history the *experience* of Christ alive and with us has come through many forms: through visions both real and palpable, through witness accounts, through metaphor, and through parable. However we as individuals may experience the risen Christ, its power holds the same possibilities for transforming for us as it did for the first Christians.

There is a problem with *only* focusing on issues of life after death when we celebrate Easter and it is that we negate God's profound love for *this* world. Jesus loved this world as God loves it. Jesus loved with a preferential option for the poor and Jesus loved those who no one else loved. Jesus also loved creation by celebrating the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, by proclaiming, like God did, that creation is *GOOD!* It is no accident that resurrection is a sign and symbol of the new life of spring because God shows God's love for this world by the renewing of life over and over through cycles of death and rebirth...”in the bulb there is a flower...”

I belabor this point for three reasons: First, people who live *only for* the afterlife diminish the value of life so much, that they may even become martyrs for misguided causes since the only life that matters to them is not here and now. This kind of response is not only the response of people who fly planes into buildings in order to more quickly reach an afterlife; it is also the people who fight the crusades to convert or kill in the name of Christ because only what happens later on is important. Perhaps this is so important to me because the first 25 years of my life was lived focused only on getting to heaven. I remember my elation when I learned that *this*

life mattered to God. It *is* possible for us to trust God with what happens to us after we die, *and* also love this world as God loves it. And the other reason to understand Easter in its many meanings is that concentrating on what happened to Jesus' body has become a stumbling block to people who think they cannot follow the *risen Christ* unless they intellectually figure out to their satisfaction what happened to his body.

The third reason is important to celebrate Easter as an affirmation of this life is that bad theology has been used as an excuse for ecological neglect and abuse. If this world doesn't matter, then why be concerned with global warming? God so loved *this* world!

We are here today, this Easter day, because of Christ alive and in our midst and in all creation. We are here because we believe that Christ reveals to us the dream of the divine creator. We are here to celebrate God in Christ alive and in our midst. We are here because God vindicated the death of an innocent man who was killed by the great powers of domination at work in Jesus time. God through Christ says "that kind of behavior will not stand, it's not part of my world, death will not win--you just watch!"

"Death will not win" is a statement that is both cosmic and deeply personal. When I've visit Judy and Hank we often speak the mantra "hugs and hope". Hugs equals love; love and hope capture the glory of Easter. We are reminded on Easter that love endures and that hope is always possible. We have a hope grounded in God of the past, God of the present, and God of the future. There is a deep knowing that comes with Easter. It is like the "aha" moments when we remember truths we sometimes forget. Truths like: tragedy can be transformed; life is not thwarted; God's mercies are new every day.

It's impossible for me to imagine the whirlwind of experiences of those early companions of Jesus on that first Easter day. The texts are so familiar to us and even if they weren't, how can words capture their experience? They've gone from *elation* as Jesus entered Jerusalem surrounded by hosannas, *expectation* that something will be different this Passover because Jesus is in town, *bewilderment* as they sense that things are going terribly wrong, *fear* as the one they call friend is condemned, *horror* as they watch his cruel death, and *despair* as they scatter not knowing what to do or where they might be safe.

But then Easter dawns and with it a *new reality* that Jesus is not dead but alive. He is alive! Now what? The disciples became followers of "the way", "Jesus' way", which was and is "God's way." And we are called to do the same; we live to love God and change the world.

Well, this year Easter feels different, perhaps "deeper", to me because of the health crisis Tom has faced, and I have faced with him. Often we've needed to remember the meaning of Easter--life triumphs even over death. I remember a particular turning point for me when out of my despair of thinking I might lose him, I came to a realization. I realized that how ever long we share life and love (even should we live to 100), it will never be enough; **AND** yet, it will always be enough because he is my life and always will be. I image that those early disciples (after a period of despair and grief and wonder) realized that no amount of time with Jesus would have been enough, and yet, it would always be enough, because Jesus had become their lives and their destinies!

I'd like to end this sermon with a short quote from our final hymn written by my mother-in-law, Elizabeth Moore.

*The joy of Easter morning, for which the trumpets sound, is only holy mystery yet lives are turned around. The One who then was missing, in these hearts can be found. By loving service, Easter's still living Lord is crowned!*