

Bible Study
Easter, Year A
April 16, 2017

[RCL] Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-18

Acts 10:34-43

Imagine a science fiction scenario for Easter 2017. All the pulpits of Christendom become 'Time and Space portals.' The preachers who step into all the pulpits around the world on this particular Easter morning are immediately shuffled to another pulpit in Christendom. A priest in Minneapolis suddenly finds herself in the pulpit of a tiny Romanian village Church, a Nigerian Pentecostal pastor finds himself suddenly standing before a large group of sailors on the deck of a US Navy aircraft carrier--you get the idea. Not only are they all the Easter morning preachers switched to another pulpit, they are also switched through time. An Anglo-Saxon bishop from the tenth century finds himself standing on a suburban Baptist mega-church platform with a tiny wire mic wrapped around his ear, a middle aged Episcopal priest from Austin, Texas suddenly materializes in a first century house church in Antioch.

All of us are to deliver our sermons as we prepared them. While each of these sermons would be remarkably different in many ways, we could hope that all of them would sound like the sermon that Peter preaches in Acts chapter 10.

- So, if you were to preach, would your Easter morning sermon sound something like Peter's?
- Would your sermon give a clear account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

This Psalm contains a tiny peek into the liturgical practices in ancient Judaism. There are instructions for "all Israel" to say, "His mercy endures forever." There is a crescendo from the individual singer to the whole nation praising the Lord.

The Psalm is exuberant and speaks of a new reality coming to light. The day of victory is here, and God's people are throwing a party of praise unlike any other. The fact that this psalm was written long before the first Easter should remind us that God had acted many times in the past for the people of God. God had delivered them many, many times and this psalm is a testimony to one such deliverance. Our Easter celebrations should give us a model for how to celebrate all the works of God in our lives, both great and small. We are generally an unthankful people, but, with enough reflection, many of us can see many things that we can be thankful for--things that are marvelous in our eyes.

- Have you had cause to celebrate lately?
- How did you celebrate that victory?

Colossians 3:1-4

After attending all the Lenten activities, after coming to worship on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and maybe even for a bit on Holy Saturday, you may feel that you need bodily resurrection. Catholic Christians, such as ourselves, journey with Jesus to the open tomb so well, that we can actually feel, in

our bodies, a deep sense of life, death, and resurrection. Our worship is supposed to work this way. This is why we change our calendars this time of year. This is why we slow down enough to read lengthy passages of Scripture and hear the central story of our faith again and again.

We focus so much on the story of Jesus passion and resurrection because we believe what St. Paul wrote to the Colossians, that we "have been raised with Christ." We have experienced the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus with him. As closely as we have walked with Jesus to the cross and empty tomb, our final union with Christ still awaits. Our revelation, our revealing still awaits us. Our search for meaning is fulfilled in the living Christ. When we think of Jesus, who is above us, the things down here cannot drag us down.

- What are some things "down here" that are distracting you?
- How did it feel to walk with Jesus through Lent and Holy Week?

John 20:1-18

John tells the story of Easter morning chaos. There is confusion, mistaken identities, and rejoicing. The emotions are intense. Disciples run in desperation. Mary is weeping. She is weeping with intensity and passion. She cannot stop herself. We hear her sobs echo down through the ages as she stands not only next to the grave of Jesus, but next to all the graves of the world. For thousands of years we have taken our loved ones, parents, children, teachers, and friends and placed them in the ground. We have covered them with dirt, and all we can do is weep.

Mary is weeping at this grave as she searches for the dead body of her friend and teacher. She is not finding what she expected. In her weeping she hears the question from Jesus, "Why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Like Mary, we must weep in our confusion when we stare into the open grave of this world. But, like Mary we hear the question in our weeping, "Whom are you looking for?" Like Mary, we are so sure we know what we are looking for that we cannot see the resurrected Christ or the resurrection he brings to us in our darkest hour.

A new reality is here, a new humanity in Jesus Christ. A new vision of eternal life is ours in Christ and we will not see it if we, like Mary and the other disciples, are merely expecting to find the dead body of a young hero. No, the Jesus of Easter is alive and comes to us in word and sacrament, and we are filled with the joy of that first Easter.

- Why are you weeping?
- Whom are you looking for?

Written by David Peters, who served as an enlisted Marine and an Army Chaplain, deploying to Baghdad, Iraq in 2005. His ministry experience includes youth ministry, hospital and military chaplaincy, as well as parish experience in Central Texas. He is a graduate of Biblical Theological Seminary (M.Div.), Erskine Theological Seminary (D.Min), and the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest (MAR). He contributed a chapter "A Spiritual War: Crises of Faith in Combat Chaplains from Iraq and Afghanistan," to the award winning book, Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis, edited by Mark Cave and Stephen M. Sloan (Oxford University Press, 2014). David also blogs for the Huffington Post and Oxford University Press and is the author of two books, Death Letter: God, Sex, and War (Tactical 16 Press, 2014) and Post-Traumatic God: How the Church Cares for People who have been to Hell and Back (Morehouse, 2016). His

memoir, Death Letter, is currently being adapted for film by director LaJuan Johnson and producer Ecky Malick. His sermon, "Learning War and Reconciliation," won the Reconciliation Preaching Prize from Trinity Wall Street. On 9/11/2015, he preached it to first responders at Ground Zero in NYC. In 2013, he founded the Episcopal Veterans Fellowship, a missional community for veterans ministry that now includes fellowships in several dioceses. He works in the veteran community as a spiritual director and leads projects that seek to tell the story of Moral Injury and reconciliation to a larger audience such as the forthcoming documentary "Coming Home" by Deidox Films, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_rvkfCWEyk&feature=youtu.be. David currently ministers as an Army Reserve instructor at the U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School at Ft. Jackson, SC and as the Associate Rector at St. Mark's Episcopal Church (<http://stmarksaustin.org/>), Austin, TX. He enjoys long-distance running, reading novels, extra-dark chocolate, and bicycle commuting. He is the father of three sons and is married to the lovely Sarah Bancroft, a museum curator and the Executive Director of the James Rosenquist Foundation. Follow him on Twitter @dvdpeters or Instagram @trail.padre. Read more about his work at www.davidwpeters.com.

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