



Fifth Sunday in Easter Sunday, May 10th, 2020

Easter Faith: Defensive or Engaging?



Resurrection Faith, Easter Faith is essentially about the celebration of life over death. This is to be understood broadly. At its heart, Christianity is a carnival of joy and hope: “if God is for us human beings, who can be against us”, as the apostle Paul put it. These last few weeks in the Easter season, we have been focusing upon a number of themes: through the lens of “doubting Thomas”, the legitimate place of questioning, but at the same time the need to move beyond the mere empirical to something deeper. Next, through the lens of the story of the Road to Emmaus, we heard of the need for Christians to look toward the horizon, to see the bigger picture, rather than be paralysed, as were the disciples, as they fixated on Jesus’ death. Last week, we heard the reading about Jesus as the sheep gate: an odd metaphor, but one that focuses upon God as the defender of the victim.

Today, we hear the Gospel reading from John’s community, concerning the “Jesus “Farewell discourse”, which is all about faith that is relational and engaging, rather than defensive. We discover however that, John’s community struggled to live up to their inspired words.

GATHERING

Announcements

Greeting

Christ is risen!

Sing a new song!

Sing praise to our still-laughing Easter God;

who has rolled away the limitations of yesterday.

Immerse your anxiety and despair in the fountain of resurrection;
for God takes ordinary things;

and makes them extraordinary.

We turn our eyes to the Paschal Candle

We light the candle knowing that our faith in Jesus

and what he represents

is sometimes strong,

sometimes elusive,

Easter is the season when we thoughtfully celebrate

Christ breaking the bounds of death

**Hymn: Sing of the Lord's Goodness (TiS 183, The Lord's
Goodness, Ernest Sands)**

Amen

The Peace

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Giving Thanks for the Easter/Resurrection Community of the Church

The Gospel reading which concerns the so called "Farewell Discourse" of Jesus, ultimately is about relationship with Jesus Christ and each other grounded in trust. In what follows, I have adopted a prayer from the Iona Community in Scotland about church as community, as relationships. We end listening to the meditative hymn of Psalm 23 that we sang last Sunday, celebrating God's consistency and loyal love that pursues us.

O God

Thank you for our time in community,
for deep if fleeting friendships,
 for those conversations that extend into the night,
for the sharing of who we are:
 vulnerability
 lubricated by laughter...and
 sometimes tears.

For the freedom to serve others and to affirm ourselves
In the face of all you know and we know of our lives

And we thank you for those signs that the churches,
 with which so many are
 disaffected and unhappy,
 can yet be your body in the world.

The Lord is My Shepherd (Brian Boniwell)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sZaJpllj_c

The young people have their session online.

BREAKING OPEN THE WORD

Some Insights about the Importance and Downright Difficulty of an Engaging Christian Faith

To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without
 faith, no explanation is possible. **Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)**

Although argument does not create conviction, the lack of it destroys
 belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no
 one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned.

Austin Farrer, "The Christian Apologist" (1904-1968)

Rome taught me what to think. Oxford taught me how to think

Gabriel Daly OSA, The Grace of Change, The Tablet, November 18th, 2017

“Religions are expressions of the sound human intuition that there is something beyond being as we experience it in this life”. The rationalists are like travellers in a non-English speaking country who think they can make themselves understood by shouting.”

Marilynn Robinson, “The Givenness of Things”(1943-)

Acts 7:55-60 (Good News Translation)

The obvious context for this reading is what precedes, indeed, also chapter 6. Despite the accusations there, Stephen is attacking neither the temple nor the Law. The Law, he declares, was given by God through angels (7:53). That means: it is sacred and authoritative. The problem was that the leaders did not keep it. Similarly, the problem with the temple is not its status, but that its leaders are corrupt. While one might attribute this to Luke's endeavour to paint the first believers as faithful Jews, it also fits what we know of the historical Jesus and his challenge to the temple authorities. Continuity is a key theme. Not the faith, but the faithlessness of the leaders is being called into question with the fairly standard accusation that they were no better than their forebears who rejected the prophets. Luke thus depicts the first Christians as in no way setting aside the ancient traditions. It also fits Luke's later depiction of Paul as a conservative who remained Law-observant all his days - in contrast to the Paul we know of the letters. So we probably have a mixture of history and theology in Luke's account, which is not so easy to untangle.

⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw God's glory and Jesus standing at the right side of God. ⁵⁶ “Look!” he said. “I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right side of God!”

⁵⁷ With a loud cry the Council members covered their ears with their hands. Then they all rushed at him at once, ⁵⁸ threw him out of the city, and stoned him. The witnesses left their cloaks in the care of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ They kept on stoning Stephen as he called out to the Lord, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” ⁶⁰ He knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord! Do not remember this sin against them!” He said this and died.

Psalm 31:1-5,15-16 (Good News Translation)

Psalm 31 is a personal lament, a cry for deliverance from enemies and affliction. It is attributed to David, along with most of the psalms in the first book of Psalms, Pss 1-41, though we do not know its origin in detail, nor its precise date. Many of the psalms were collected as part of the oral tradition of Israel's worship over the centuries, first into smaller collections, and then only brought together into the larger collection we

now know very late in Old Testament times. It is presumed the psalms were used in the worshipping community as part of temple services and private devotions, and were often set to music (though this psalm does not specify a tune as some possibly do). The theology of this psalm implies that God is responsive to those who call upon God, that it is in God's nature to deliver and save God's people when they are afflicted by illness or enemies, and to hear them when they cry. There is a quiet confidence in God's love and willingness to help that is at the heart of faith. The assurance that in God, the person of faith may find refuge accords well with the gospel of the day, in which Jesus encourages his followers to believe in God, who has prepared a place for them (John 14).

31 I come to you, LORD, for protection;

never let me be defeated.

You are a righteous God;

save me, I pray!

² Hear me! Save me now!

Be my refuge to protect me;

my defence to save me.

³ You are my refuge and defence;

guide me and lead me as you have promised.

⁴ Keep me safe from the trap that has been set for me;

shelter me from danger.

⁵ I place myself in your care.

You will save me, LORD;

you are a faithful God.

¹⁵ I am always in your care;

***save me from my enemies,
from those who persecute me.***

¹⁶ Look on your servant with kindness;

save me in your constant love.

1 Peter 2:2-10 (Good News Translation)

The imagery of birth met us already back in 1:3 and it repeated itself in 1:23. Another theme is holiness, which featured especially in 1:14-15 and reappears in 1:22. The new born life contrasts with the old ways against which 1:13-14 warns, a warning repeated in 2:1. That warning properly begins chapter 2, but our passages drops that introduction and moves directly to the image of the suckling infant. We should not, however, forget this context. We are soon to hear of construction of a holy place and life in holy priesthood. All this belongs within a setting where sharp demarcations are being made. The feeding is for growth. The goal is salvation which is clearly something much more than future hope. It includes belonging in a holy community.

² Be like newborn babies, always thirsty for the pure spiritual milk, so that by drinking it you may grow up and be saved. ³ As the scripture says, "You have found out for yourselves how kind the Lord is."

⁴ Come to the Lord, the living stone rejected by people as worthless but chosen by God as valuable. ⁵ Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple, where you will serve as holy priests to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For the scripture says,

“I chose a valuable stone,
which I am placing as the cornerstone in Zion;
and whoever believes in him will never be disappointed.”

⁷ This stone is of great value for you that believe; but for those who do not believe:

“The stone which the builders rejected as worthless
turned out to be the most important of all.”

⁸ And another scripture says,

“This is the stone that will make people stumble,
the rock that will make them fall.”

They stumbled because they did not believe in the word; such was God's will for them.

⁹ But you are the chosen race, the King's priests, the holy nation, God's own people, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvellous light. ¹⁰ At one time you were not God's people, but now you are his people; at one time you did not know God's mercy, but now you have received his mercy.

John 14:1-14 (Good News Translation)

This passage does not stand alone in its context, but forms part of Jesus' parting words to his disciples which began in 13:31. There Jesus announced his return to the Father's glory (his glorification) and went on in 13:32 to explain that he was going somewhere where the disciples could not follow him (at least, not for now). This is the beginning of confusion on the part of the disciples. The conversation continues in chapter 14 where Jesus says more about his departure and the disciples take it in turn to ask rather naive questions, right through until the end of the chapter, where it seems at one stage an earlier draft of Jesus' parting words ended (14:31), before it was supplemented with chapters 15-17 in the final drafts of the gospel.

The essence of the section is quite simply this: John has been portraying Jesus' last words to his disciples, but doing so with an eye to his hearers and future generations, including us! Their distress and confusion about Jesus' fate becomes a paradigm for confusion and distress in our own experience. While John employs the individual disciples to enhance the drama, its message is simple and telling. Trust that God is the way Jesus told us and demonstrated to us. That means two things: we can trust in the God of compassion in which there's a place for us (even if we know nothing else!) and we can know that the meaning of life is to share that compassion in the world - there's

a place for all! We can join that compassion wherever we recognise its 'Jesus shape', acknowledging it as life and truth and the only way.

14 “Do not be worried and upset,” Jesus told them. “Believe in God and believe also in me. ² There are many rooms in my Father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so ³ And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am. ⁴ You know the way that leads to the place where I am going.”

⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going; so how can we know the way to get there?”

⁶ Jesus answered him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me. ⁷ Now that you have known me,” he said to them, “you will know^[c] my Father also, and from now on you do know him and you have seen him.”

⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father; that is all we need.”

⁹ Jesus answered, “For a long time I have been with you all; yet you do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Why, then, do you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Do you not believe, Philip, that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I have spoken to you,” Jesus said to his disciples, “do not come from me. The Father, who remains in me, does his own work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. If not, believe because of the things I do. ¹² I am telling you the truth: those who believe in me will do what I do—yes, they will do even greater things, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father's glory will be shown through the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me^[d] for anything in my name, I will do it.

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

A Discussion with Colin....

Offering

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication**Prayers of the People**

The one who prays after a series of petitions says, "Raise us Lord" and the people respond, "Make us a risen people".

We end with the Lord's Prayer

Our Father

***Our Father in heaven
hallowed be your name
your kingdom come
your will be done
on earth as in heaven.***

Give us today our daily bread.

***Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.***

***For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.***

하늘에 계신 우리 아버지여
이름이 거룩히 여김을 받으시오며
나라이 임하옵시며
뜻이 하늘에서 이룬 것 같이
땅에서도 이루어지이다.
오늘날 우리에게 일용할 양식을 주옵시고
우리가 우리에게

죄 지은 자를 사하여 준 것 같이
 우리 죄를 사하여 주옵시고
 우리를 시험에 들게 하지 마옵시고
 다만 악에서 구하옵소서
 대개 나라와 권세와 영광이
 아버지께 영원히 있사옵나이다. 아멘

Final Hymn: Lord you have come to the lakeshore (Tú has venido a la orilla, Cesáreo Gabaraín, New Century Hymnal, 173)

You have come down to the lakeshore,
 seeking neither the wise nor the wealthy,
 but only asking for me to follow.

*O Jesus, you have looked into my eyes
 kindly smiling you have called out my name.
 On the sand I have abandoned my small boat.
 Now with you, I will seek other seas.*

You know full well my possessions,
 neither treasure nor weapons for conquest,
 just these my fishnets and will for working.

*O Jesus, you have looked into my eyes
 kindly smiling you have called out my name.
 On the sand I have abandoned my small boat.
 Now with you, I will seek other seas.*

You need my hands, my exhaustion,
 working love for the rest of the weary,
 a love that's willing to go on loving.

*O Jesus, you have looked into my eyes
kindly smiling you have called out my name.
On the sand I have abandoned my small boat.
Now with you, I will seek other seas.*

You who have fished other waters,
you the longing of souls that are yearning,
as loving friend you have come to call me.

*O Jesus, you have looked into my eyes
kindly smiling you have called out my name.
On the sand I have abandoned my small boat.
Now with you, I will seek other seas.*

Blessing

Christ is risen!

We see reality through resurrection

We seek to live lovingly, truthfully, inclusively

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

Our service has ended.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Amen