

Following Jesus' Humanity: Why I Am Lent People
Sermon Transcript

April 18, 2021 – *Easter 3, Year B*
Acts 3:12-19 | Psalm 4 | 1 John 3:1-7

Luke 24:36b-48

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It is often said of Episcopalians that “we are Easter People” - we say this of ourselves as we look toward the event of the resurrection with gladness, with joy, with celebration... we even hide that one, *exuberant* word for **40 days** before bringing it forth at the Easter Vigil to share it with the world: “**Alleluia!**” We say, “Christ is risen!”

The thing is... I am not “Easter People” - I am *Lent People*; which is to say, *I am not* a Christian **because of** the resurrection... I still have my doubts there; like Thomas, like the disciples that Jesus appeared to in today's Gospel, who were “startled and terrified.”

I still have doubts - but that is **not** the same as saying I have no faith. I still have doubts, **and I hold fast to my faith**. Because as our reading from 1st John reminded us this morning, we *are* all children of God.

I am *not* a Christian **because of** the resurrection... I do not **need** Jesus to be the Christos, the Anointed One; I don't need miracles or a descent into hell, or even the mysterious and glorified bodily resurrection, where Jesus appeared to the women at the tomb and to various of his followers.

I am not a Christian **because of** the resurrected *Christ*... I am a Christian **because of Jesus' teachings** and who he was as a man. **I am a Christian** because the words of a poor, rural, God-touched rabbi who lived over 2,000 years ago spoke to my heart and called me.

I worry sometimes that as Christians we put so much emphasis on Jesus' Divine nature that we forget or ignore that he was human like us: he had good days and bad, he got frustrated and angry when people didn't listen to him, he got into arguments with respected civil and religious leaders and with members of his family, and was even caught making what we would consider racist remarks. He was disappointed in and at times even disgusted by his followers when they failed to understand a point of scripture, sometimes chiding them for their lack of faith. He

laughed and loved and wept and raged and stormed off; he meditated and argued, he prayed... he lived a human life.

But in looking back at it over such a great distance, we tend to perceive what Marcus Borg and John Dominick Crossan refer to as “the post-Easter Jesus”... we apply the filter of the resurrection and who he later became seen as, to the life that he lived; even though it seems he probably lived a rather normal one until he entered public ministry, a few short years before his death.

My faith is not based on the *resurrected* Christ... so Eastertide, as you may imagine, does not ignite me the way it does so many of his followers.

It's not that I don't get it - I do. We long for joy, for celebration, for assurance... we long for guidance and for hope, for evidence of that *Great Power* which is so far above and beyond our knowing... and in the Easter event, we do see all these things.

But I find I am still back in Lent; trying to hold onto the days of turning back towards God and *somber inner quiet* just a little longer; still reflecting, still wanting to sit at the Master's feet and learn... because **in Lent, he was still human** and lived and walked, ate and taught among us, as one of us - **was one of us**.

We talk about Jesus in the here-and-now, that he “Lives,” that he dwells among us and within us - **and I don't argue that**.

But on a deeper level, I suppose I'm a pragmatist; and **I need Jesus in all his imperfect humanity**. I don't want to touch Jesus' hands and feet just yet, to put my hand to his wounds and *feel* him resurrected - not really.

When I think of Jesus of Nazareth, I don't look for the **Living God**, the **2nd Person of the Holy Trinity**... I want to read and absorb and learn his teachings, to embody the Love he spoke about, to call upon the *Parent* he prayed to with such fervor, devotion and longing.

I seek, as Mary of Bethany did, the all-too-human wandering rabbi, who sat and shared meals with all the wrong people and spoke about God from a place of **personal** knowledge and connection.

The man who did not say, “I don't know, I think God *might* be like” (this or that thing); but spoke to what “God **is** like...” like a mustard seed, like an exquisite pearl, like a parent who welcomes back a wayward child.

Jesus spoke from experience, from **knowing** God; and I want to speak from that experience too... not of *Christ-who-is-God*, but of that One who Jesus' life constantly pointed towards, the Great, compassionate and loving Divine Parent who seeks to protect us all under the shelter of her wings...

And to know *that* God is to look beyond the **limitations we ascribe** to “God-the-Father,” “God-the-Son,” or even “God-the-Spirit”... it is to acknowledge how very limited our human experience is, how little we can really know, and to accept that the Divine is so much larger, so much more vast, expansive, unending and unlimited than we can ever describe, no matter how many adjectives we conjure up.

I am not a Christian because of the resurrection... so in our Gospel today, it was not *Jesus inviting his terrified followers to touch his hands and feet and see for themselves* that I wanted to pause and think about. It was later in the reading, when Luke reported, “Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.”

It makes me think of another Biblical moment that spoke to me many years ago and drew me toward my own baptism. It's a story from the *Acts of the Apostles* about a foreigner, an exotic, high-powered outsider from the Ethiopian court (who was Black and a gender minority too, but we can get into that another time... the reading is coming up in several weeks...).

This person was being driven through the countryside in a chariot, and was reading from the Prophet Isaiah. An evangelist named Philip was guided by the Spirit to join this traveler and when asked, taught him the meaning behind the passage he was reading - and also about Jesus, whom he believed Isaiah had been prophesying about. Philip “opened (the traveler's) mind to the scriptures” and it called to this person so strongly that he insisted on being baptized then and there. He said, “Here is a body of water - what is to keep me from being baptized now?”

Jesus was raised on the Hebrew scriptures and he helped others to understand them, to get to the core teachings; his own interpretations and insights became the core teachings **we** follow... **so I seek to understand deeper**, so that I might in turn help others to come closer to God.

In that telling that we call “the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch,” Philip does baptize the traveler as they are passing that body of water - and then having done that, he disappears, **Spirited away** (literally) to another place where he can preach the Gospel to others, where he can continue to “open *their* minds to understand the scriptures.”

So here I am on my virtual soapbox, missing the solitude of Lent and reflecting aloud upon scriptural teachings... seeking to understand them deeper and to come closer to this God of Love that Jesus sought to imprint upon our hearts through his teachings, his actions, the sharing of bread and wine and thought; through his insistence on **justice** and standing *against* oppression; and his refusal to keep his mouth shut when he had something that needed saying.

And it is **this** that lets me know that I **am** *where* and *as* I am supposed to be: not perfect, not better-than or special, or enlightened (or “woke”)... just another human being, like the very human teacher I have come to love, trust and follow.

And following him, there is a thing that needs saying.

I sit here with you this morning parsing through scriptures, examining theological philosophy and sharing self-reflection, while such deep injustices are going on in the world, that I can't truly wrap my brain around them. **As a follower of Jesus, called to a path of Love and Compassion**, oath-sworn to respect the dignity of every person, to resist evil in every form and to acknowledge that we are all children of God; as a deacon, called to raise a prophetic voice against injustice... I would like us now to take a minute - a full, silent minute - to be in silence together before we move on; to acknowledge and give space for things that are too much to wrap our brains around; that seem too daunting and overwhelming; that are so important, we cannot sit back and ignore them. I want to call us now into a minute of silence before we continue, for all the lives that have been lost to violence.

[One minute of silence, timed]

Thank you.