

Sermon, Father William J. Albinger

Sunday April 4, 2010

Easter 2010

(Sermon delivered from notes – this is a recreation):

In the name of one living God who creates abundantly, loves extravagantly and sustains eternally: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Easter service starts out with a joyous shout: “Alleluia, Christ is Risen!” But if you look at our Gospel lesson, there were no shouts, no alleluias that first Easter morning. No, that first Easter morning started out with unexplainable things – the women finding an empty tomb, the stone rolled away and two dazzling men in white there. It started with a question; “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” Then a simple statement; “He is not here.” Finally, a good suggestion; “Remember when he told you...”

That first Easter was filled with fears, questions and doubts. Nothing about it made any sense at all. For Peter and the other disciples, there wasn't supposed to be a tomb in the first place. Oh, yes, he talked about being killed and about those who wished to gain their lives must lose their lives. But who was listening to that? This was supposed to end in a great victory – not a shameful death on a cross. For Pilate, Herod and the others who put Jesus in that tomb, there wasn't supposed to be an empty tomb. They thought they had nailed down that problem.

The first Easter is like all other Easters. It is really about questions. What does this empty tomb mean? There were no answers – only possibilities. The first Easter is like all other Easters – it is not the end of a story it is a new starting point for a very old story. It is about God and God's calling out to God's creation. The joy of Easter is in its possibilities. God isn't done with us yet! God calls us into new life.

In our lesson from Isaiah, the prophet saw that someday God was going to do a totally

new thing and bring about a new creation. This passage was written after the Israelites had returned to Jerusalem from captivity. Isaiah saw that what was supposed to be a new start was going off the tracks again. He saw the same walls going up, the same reliance on might, the same institutions of power being reestablished, the same laws being put into place. He saw that for some reason we can't seem to help ourselves. For things to work, he saw that we had to be changed and only God could lead us there. Only God could build a house of prayer for all people.

For Peter and the others, Easter didn't happen all at once on that morning. It took some time. At first the reports of the women were idle chatter. He had to come to faith and to that he had to deal with the guilt of not understanding and of having abandoned Jesus in the garden. Easter started when he heard Jesus' words, "Peace be with you." Easter starts with words of forgiveness and with internalizing and accepting that forgiveness. Peter could then move beyond forgiveness to reconciliation. Being transformed himself, he could enter into a new relationship with the Lord.

Easter is not a long ago once upon a time story. There is no end to Easter – it was meant to always be a new starting point every day. Like Peter we don't witness the Resurrection, we start with the empty tomb and lots of questions. We only see its effects when the Resurrection is witnessed to us. We experience it only through its effects on others and in our own lives. We don't have to see it to believe it, we experience it when we are open to see the possibilities.

Peter didn't come to faith all at once. I take some comfort in that. Faith isn't about knowing, it is about a relationship, about putting our trust in another, about being vulnerable enough to risk being changed. Transformation is a process not an event. We are not all in the same place. We aren't supposed to be. If, like Peter, we can be curious without having answers, we, too, might be open to possibilities. If we can do that, we can see changes in ourselves and in others.

In our reading from the Book of Acts, we see Peter still not quite understanding Easter, still not understanding the full meaning of this new creation God is calling into being. Peter here is having another breakthrough Easter moment. Peter has a vision where God is commanding him to eat all sorts of foods that are expressly forbidden in the Book of Leviticus. He is again confused, “What could this all mean?” He is still spinning when there is a knock at the door. It is three foreign soldiers from the Italian Division who ask Peter to come to see Cornelius, their officer, in Caesarea, the new Roman port city. Now, Jews weren’t supposed to associate with Gentiles at all, but the Spirit directed Peter to go despite his misgivings. When Peter arrives at Cornelius’ house he rather ungraciously says, “You all know it is a sin for me, a Jew, to be associating with you Gentile types. I’m only here because God told me to come. Now what do you want?” How’s that for evangelizing!

But now Peter remembers. He remembers Jesus healing Gentiles. He remembers Jesus praising the Good Samaritan and calling the hemorrhaging woman “daughter” and healing her. Peter is opening up by remembering. Now he sees how God has transformed Cornelius and his household. He doesn’t think, he experiences. He sees God acting in others and he, himself, is changed. He not only embraces them, he baptizes them into the Body of Christ.

Our faith is like Peter’s – it doesn’t happen all at once. It involves the incomprehensible and starts out with lots of questions. Asking questions leads to seeing possibilities, which leads to seeing Christ alive in the world. Everyone is not at the same place – and that is OK. We are all on a journey. As we are changed, we become witnesses to others.

The Good News is that Easter happens everyday. It is big and we are part of it. Happy Easter to all.