

Easter II Year B 2018

I don't know about y'all but this past Lent has seemed especially long to me. There has been the Parkland, Florida shooting, and the callous vilification of the surviving kids of that massacre by the NRA and the alt-right; then the package bombs in Austin; the expiration of the DACA accord, the directive that granted asylum from deportation to immigrants who were brought here as children; the continuing dismantling of environmental laws; the scandals now too many to number in the White House; the dysfunction and corruption of our democracy, both nationally and in our state; violence on the streets of Mobile... Lent is supposed to be the time in our church year in which we look death in the eye, as it were; to acknowledge the many forms that death takes... we take a hard look at death so that we might be prepared to receive the Good News of Easter Sunday... Indeed in our liturgical life this time of year we hold up the paradox that in a world undone by death and shame, there is the promise and the hope of new life. But it seems to me these days that death and its myriad manifestations might have the upper hand... and what I mean by death, is not just physical death, but I mean anything that stands in the way of a rich and abundant life, a life characterized by well-being and dignity... T.S. Eliot called this dilemma, death in Life... So now we are in Easter, for fifty days, and nothing has changed much; the

world is beset still by evil, as it ever has been... and one has to wonder where God is in all this... if God is so Good, so powerful as to raise one from the dead, then why not set things right? Set things right in our world, and while you're at it God... set things right in our dysfunctional families... we say during these great fifty days that God has once and for all redeemed the world, saved it from itself, paid the price... and yet the elephant in the room for us people of faith is that things are as they have ever been... So where are you God? If you haven't ever asked that question then you're probably not paying attention... But let me remind you gently that faith is much more about questions than it is about answers; that is at least true in the Episcopal Church.... And 'where is God' is a good question; it is THE question.

The writers and seers of scripture amid their inspired reveries have speculated as to where God might be... amid the slings and arrows of their daily lives, amid the stress and strain of their history; amid their tragedies and triumphant jublations they have offered their imaginative vision as to where God might be... In the beginning it was God they proposed who clothed the man and the woman upon their expulsion from the garden; from slavery in Egypt it was God they imagined that freed them; In the desert of Sinai it was God who sustained them they marveled; a cloud by day, and a fiery pillar of flame by night;

it was God who galvanized the disparate tribes of the Hebrews into a nation; It was God who returned them to their homeland from deportation in Babylon; It was God who expelled the Assyrians and their false gods from Jerusalem But alas, there has never been any resolution, no culmination, no consummation of heaven and earth as the prophets foretold.... On the heels of every saving moment of Israel's history, there have arisen new obstacles, new problems, new crises... How long O God how long?

Perhaps the problem, at least for us, is expectations... we expect this all powerful, all knowing God, in Spielberg fashion, to change things for the better. We say we want to know God; and then we demur and say that God is unknowable... then we wish for one ecstatic glimpse; perhaps some secret knowledge only possessed by a few; we want the red seas of our lives parted; we want to live in eternal happiness... we want something that we think we don't have.. a blinding flash perhaps... we want certainty, understanding, order... and now it is Easter, and nothing has changed. Is something wrong with us?

So let's look at two Easter texts from the gospels.... Perhaps there is something for us there. Today we read from John's gospel, the famous story of doubting Thomas... but first let's backtrack and look again at Mark's resurrection

account. You remember, there is no resurrection appearance of Jesus in Mark... Only the women encounter a young man sitting in the tomb, clothed in white... It's the same young man whom we saw just a few lines earlier stripped naked and shamed into cowardice.... The women are racked with disappointment and fear. Things have not turned out the way they expected... and at the climax of this gospel, the young man speaks with poignant and surprising authority... and he tells the women to go home... "Go home," he tells them to return to Galilee... He tells them to go back into the grind, back to the world they know, back to their ministries of taking care of the people God gave them... there, he says, you will encounter the raised Christ; there you will see God... plain and simple.

In John's gospel, Thomas doesn't experience the raised Christ until he puts his hand into the wounds of Jesus' very body... and he declares, "My Lord and my God."

Brothers and sisters, our expectation is that God is something completely other... that God is out there, or up there... But these writers are telling us that God is not out there or up there... that God's otherness is only as far away as the wounds of our neighbor; that God is experienced in the brokenness of our world. Both of these stories in Mark and in John are stories not so much of revelation,

but accounts of recognition... recognition, 'knowing again', that God, that Jesus' raised body is found in the world's broken people... God is not about resolution, or some final dramatic conclusion... God is found in the loving care of our neighbor. God is not the end of things, but the very process of life in all of its dysfunction. God is seen and experienced in the process of Love... God is known in the care of the world's wounded.... In spite of the evil in the world, there is Love, and so there is God who lives and suffers and exults among us... and because God is Love, God can't be contained in the grave... because Love never dies, and Love is stronger than death. That is what we proclaim as Easter people, that the Love we follow, the Love we serve, the love we bear is stronger than the deathly evil that plagues our world; stronger than the shame that persists in it. That is our sacred claim. Even the fantastic metaphors of scripture aren't enough to speak of the Love of God: the red sea parting, the sun standing still, the dead raised from the grave... all point to the persistent and irrepressible power of Love that can't be contained, and that will never be vanquished.

This search for God, dear friends, is not about finding. It is about recognition. In every act of kindness; in every act of sacrifice, in our care for our neighbor, in our welcoming the stranger, in our dignifying the shamed among us... God is as present as God was present at the Red Sea.... In mere acts of Love, God

is as present as God was present in raising Jesus from the dead.... So go home
good people... go to where your calling is... go into the streets of Mobile.... Your
Galilee; go clothed in the praise-worthy white of your baptism... and there you
will see him.... just as he told you.