

“Both sides now”
Easter Sunday, April 4, 2010

This morning I would like to start by recalling a song recorded in 1968 – and recorded by many others since – a song up Joni Mitchell “Both sides now”. It is about seeing the good and bad in life, the joys and sorrows. It is about seeing both sides of life as we live it.

There is another way to think about “both sides”. A couple of weeks ago I saw the movie “The lovely bones”, based on the best selling book by Alice Sebold. The lovely bones is a story of a 14 year old girl from suburban Pennsylvania who is murdered by her neighbour. She tells the story from Heaven, showing the lives of the people around her and how they have changed all the while attempting to get someone to find her lost body.

The “both sides” include life on earth and her new life. It is about the various ways her family copes with her death. It is also about how she copes with her new life. The subtle message is that until she is ready to move on her survivors cannot move on either.

This is another attempt to understand what it means to have life after death, what it means to grasp something of both sides of life. We all know how difficult this is. But this is Easter Sunday when we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. For the Christian Community this is the celebration of life on both sides.

Again this morning we heard the story of the empty tomb. I believe that those who experienced the resurrection of Jesus could only take in so much. The empty tomb was a way to explain that Jesus was again amongst the living, that somehow he has experienced both sides of life and is not yet ready to move on. Again this morning we heard the story about Mary Magdalene, then Peter, then John running toward and then into the tomb. All they found were the cloths of death. The empty tomb pushed them into a whole new experience – the first step in understanding that Jesus was alive in them.

We gather on Easter Sunday morning to consider the implications of the empty tomb. We come not to debate exactly what happened between Friday and Sunday. We come to hear that Jesus, who was dead, is alive. I would like to share some thoughts from Bishop Jack Spong, who with Marcus Bourg, offer us a fresh understanding of our faith.

Bishop Spong writes... “The experience of Jesus as risen Lord ... underlies every verse of Christian writing. There is no question about the reality of Easter as a source of power or the centrality of Easter in the life of the believer. Obviously something happened after the death of Jesus that had a startling and enormous power. Its power was sufficient to reconstitute a scattered and demoralized band of disciples. Its reality was profound enough to turn a denying Peter into a witnessing and martyred Peter, and to turn disciples who fled for their lives into heroes willing to die for their Lord. Easter was so intense that it created a new holy day, Sunday, the first day of the week and it created a new act of worship – the breaking of bread – Holy Communion. Easter was of such power, that Jewish disciples could no longer conceive of God apart from Jesus of Nazareth. They could no longer look at Jesus without seeing God. Easter meant that Jesus had been taken into God and vindicated by God. It also meant that Jesus had transcended death and was therefore even present to the disciples as the “Spirit.” (End of Dr. Spong’s words.)

I offer the following observations – some pictures – when put together may help us to be better Easter people.

I like to think about the faithfulness of the women who followed Jesus. According to Luke the women at the tomb were the same women who were with Jesus at the crucifixion and burial. They were included as the disciples of Jesus. They are mentioned by name. This is in contrast to the men who deserted Jesus when his life and theirs were in danger. The men responded with their minds and feet, the women with their hearts.

I like Luke's account of the resurrection because it mentions us who are gathered here this morning. The women left the tomb with the assurance that Jesus was alive. *They remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told the eleven and all the rest.* "To all the rest" – that includes us.

I like to think about the story in John's gospel where Mary, quietly weeping does not recognize Jesus until he speaks her name. It may be in our time of loss and when we are all alone that we too experience the risen Christ, who knows us by name.

I like to think about the "east" in Easter. A new day, a new opportunity for life – a new day to be alive. That is why some of us gathered this morning at the dawn of this new day.

I like to think about Easter as the eighth day of creation. Easter is so much more than Easter bunnies, baby chicks, and new growth in the garden. Easter is not a spring festival. Yet, there is a connection between these symbols of new life and the new life that God offers us in the Easter story.

I like to think about the Easter faith that calls people to worship on Sunday, people who experience a lot of stress in life, and walk through them knowing God is with them. I like to think about people who accept challenges and live with hope, people who know that with God all things are possible.

I like to think about people who know life is a continuum within and without the physical body. Death is a transition. Death takes us to another level of living. We can know this, not because we can prove it, but because Jesus did it.

I like to think about God who walks with us, who holds us in the palm of his hand, who gives new life to our lives, and puts a sense of peace and joy into our hearts.

"The message of the Resurrection isn't simply don't be afraid to die. The message of the Resurrection is don't be afraid to live – to live for those things worth dying for." (DeWane Zimmerman)

I like to think about Easter as our time to celebrate that this is God's world and we are God's people. God's promise is to be with us on both sides. **"Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed"**. That is all we need to hear.

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Sunday, April 4, 2010