

It Happens More Than We Think

Probably all of us have had moments when we were with someone and then suddenly, caught off guard, realized that we knew who they were!

Like Mary this morning:

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

She had no idea he was Jesus. I mean, *who would have thought?!*

Jesus said to her, "Mary." And suddenly she knew and shouted out in recognition! Rabboni!

Life in the presence of God is sort of like that. Going along and then someone or something happens and suddenly, well, we often say, "Oh, my God!"

This is a time especially like that - a time of surprises, reminders...and questions

Over this last week, Holy Week, – we've been in preparation for this day...

It's not an easy time in a lot of ways. Walking this path in an intentional way still causes me to cringe, when we retell the story of these last days of Jesus, the betrayal, torture, and abandonment...

But there is good reason to remember, and so we do. Year after year.

We slow down, enter prayer, meditation...
It's the slowing down that is often the tricky part for me...

Lent is a way of gradually doing that, coming down from the excitement and Hosannas of Palm Sunday...

Entering Holy Thursday...

Maundy Thursday, when we commemorate the Last Supper and remember the betrayal of Jesus...

Good Friday, no explanation needed...

And Holy Saturday and the Easter Vigil – a service that links us to the very ancient tradition of the early followers and new disciples of Jesus, through the symbolism of lighting the paschal candle from new fire (symbolizing the new light of Jesus that has come into the world), the retelling of the stories of the First Testament and readings of the Second Testament, a service of baptism or the reaffirmation of our baptismal vows, and then gathering at the table for communion...

These days do not pass without being struck by the treatment of Jesus at the hand of his friends, as well as his executioners. They do not pass without the thought that in a time of thousands of crucifixions by the Romans to make their point – I have a feeling that none of our headlines would surprise them.

While we are talking about Jesus and Christianity...

In this place, we are a people who find God in many ways, welcoming all paths, honoring all traditions, attempting in the best of ways we can to be faithful, practicing, humble...in living up to our own beliefs.

I think it is no different in any embrace of God that reflection and quiet often are very helpful. There has been silence this week as well. It's funny how hard it is to sometimes be still and let the silence be. In such a place, especially following the vigil last night, the first service of Easter, I knew the resurrection had already taken place. I knew that it was all around us and that the Risen Jesus was, well, risen and already here.

That is not to diminish the great message of Easter Sunday, the breaking of the hold of death on our lives. Last Sunday and on Good Friday as we recalled the crucifixion, we remembered the words Jesus called out: "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani..." My God, my God why have you forsaken me?"

We talked about the full humanity of Jesus and the painful prayers we sometimes all pray, when we feel as though even God – however you know God – has disappeared. And yet, in the mystery that I don't understand, that descent into human despair and abandonment for Jesus didn't end the story. His resurrection, whether Spirit or Body or both signified for his disciples then and all of us since that even in our most painful of prayers we are never out of God's reach. Even in our greatest of losses death has no power. The intersection of the cross symbolizes that we are no longer – and never were – lost to God.

The Good News is that the Love of God, a love that exceeds all understanding is fully accessible, the more so based on the more we let go of our own demands, desires, and expectations.

The humanity and divinity of Jesus opened the truth to what was there before...God would never lose us or let us go. Whatever the transition from this life to the next may be, it is. And there and here, as well, in the mystery, wonder, and Love of God are all those who have gone before – all those who guide us now, echoing what we all know deep down inside...we have nothing to fear.

It's easy to understand why lofty and mysterious talk about such things generates skepticism, cynicism, and downright scorn – not to mention a fair amount of persecution over the ages. I can't prove a thing to you. You enter into that dialogue in many ways, including through communities like this. However, at one point, only you will see what you need to hold on – even when the vision is incomplete. If we look around, really look around...the evidence of God and the Resurrection of Jesus in the Spirit...surrounds us in enough ways – that we all can see it.

I think that if we really give it some thought, if we really let ourselves slip away from the things we hold onto to make sense of the world – or even get even with parts of it – if we just stopped and looked long enough – we could all see the signs of resurrection.

Think of the changes you have known in your own lives from the painful prayers to a way of healing; remember the times you have felt deeply touched by the presence of others, had tears come to your eyes at the sight of something that reached your heart without warning; think of the people you know who were once given up on – and have had their lives turned around...

Think of the simple things that have changed your moment, your day...maybe your life...

Last night, scrambling to get ready I had to maneuver around several meetings and one minor but annoying problem. For a moment, I questioned whether or not we should have just canceled the many meetings that take place on a Saturday night, so we could have the sanctuary quiet and to ourselves, starting earlier – rather than waiting until everyone was gone and extending an already long day into a very long night. That would have not reflected who we are in seeing all that happens here as part of church...still, it felt like that...

As the meetings broke up, I darted into the sanctuary with candles and bulletins and candles and stuff – being my tasky-self. At one point I heard someone ask if I could use some help. I turned to see someone from one of the meetings hanging back making sure I had some help if I needed it.

It was a small gesture and it stopped me as quickly as he asked. It reminded me that we are a people who care, even when we move too fast to remember that. It was one of those moments of resurrection, when my world, my taskiness had momentarily taken over, close – too close to the neighborhood of skepticism,

self-interest, and forgetting how much greater God and being in God's presence is – than anything I or we might assemble.

It was a resurrection of what is the truth: that we are Loved and God often speaks to us through others, that the presence of God is always there to help us, not test us. Jesus knew this, even when he forgot. A prayer, painful or otherwise is still a prayer and a petition for help. All we have to do is ask or maybe ask another if we can help them...sort of the same prayer that describes Jesus' life.

Resurrection for us is remembering that Jesus is risen and that as Peter is quoted as saying in Acts: "It's God's own truth, nothing could be plainer: God plays no favorites! It makes no difference who you are or where you're from – if you are ready for God, the door is open!

The Light has been lit. And resurrection is all about us, more often than we think. It is resurrection that I pray for and wish for you. And, in advance, thanks for your help in reminding me...when I forget, too.

It's all connected to the light in the world that is always with us. It is in fact our place in the resurrection – and it happens more often than we might think.