

Easter Sermon: That you spend it all with me

Happy Easter!

Last month my wife Eve and I went to an 80th birthday party for a friend. She is a musician, a pianist and singer, and with friends gave some entertainment after dinner. She told the story of how her husband proposed to her. They were both widowed. He sent her a sheet of music, I gather that was all that was in the envelope although she knew where it came from. The sheet was the lyrics of the song "What are you doing the rest of your life?" The lyrics are by Alan Bergman and Marilyn Bergman to Michel Legrand's music:

What are you doing the rest of your life?

North and south and east and west of your life

I have only one request of your life

That you spend it all with me....

Well, that is God's Easter invitation to us in Jesus. There is the promise of resurrection, to spend eternity with God. What are you reading the rest of eternity? And there is the promise of God's presence and love and friendship in the new life here and now. God's invitation in Jesus:

I have only one request of your life

That you spend it all with me...

I love today's Gospel, the first of the Easter stories in John's Gospel. It was early in the morning the first Easter, before the sun was up. Mary Magdalene went to the garden where they buried Jesus and found the tomb empty. We heard how she ran and got Simon Peter and John and they came and saw it was empty too. And then they left and she stood weeping.

... she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was him

These stories tell us that on the first Easter, for a brief time, the risen Jesus was visibly present with his friends. In the stories, Jesus' friends do not recognize him at first. The writers seem to be saying "it is the same Jesus, the whole person, risen from the dead, yet changed." The same person, the whole person, the tomb is empty. The same, yet changed.

Behold, I shew a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 15:51-52)

Jesus asked her why she was weeping. She thought he was the gardener, working in the place. And then he said her name, simply her name.

Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

And she recognized him.

She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!"

It was when he spoke her name that she recognized him.

The disciples at Emmaus recognized him at the supper table when once again he took the bread and gave thanks and broke it to give it to them. (Luke 24:13-35) Just exactly so, the risen Christ is present with us, offering us his love and friendship, when we break the bread at every Eucharist, when we listen to his story and break the bread, share and are nourished by his Word.

The disciples in the Upper Room a week later recognized him when he showed the scars of his passion on his risen body. (John 20:19-31) So when we are in trouble in life, we remember he has been through it, and God knows what it is like, and is with us in him, loving us.

Later in Galilee, the fishermen recognized him when he gave an order and they obeyed and the nets came up full of fish. (John 21:1-14) So Jesus sends us, his disciples, to serve people in Chicago in all the ways people help others, feeding, welcoming, teaching, healing.

And now in today's story, the first Easter story, Mary recognized Jesus when he spoke her name. So he speaks our name at our Baptism. So God is with each one, with me, with you in him.

Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father."

Do not hold on to me. Do not cling to me. In Jerome's Latin, the traditional title of this painting *Noli me tangere*. To me this means, do not hold on to this visible presence we can see. It is only given for a short time. Do not cling to that.

Hold on to God. Hold on to God's love for you, you see in Jesus. Trust that God is with you and loves you in Jesus. Do not let anyone or anything break your trust in God.

"But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "

Jesus would ascend to heaven, would no longer be visibly present. But Jesus would come to us in an even closer way, unseen, in God the Holy Spirit to live within us in the inner Temple of our bodies, the interior Temple. So Jesus comes in the Spirit to abide with us, and we in him.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

(This sermon was preached by the Rev. Raymond Webster, Rector, in St. Chrysostom's Church, Chicago, Illinois, on Easter Day, April 12, 2009.)