

Peace Only -- 3 Easter B

Jesus said that we shall know the truth, and the truth shall set us free. Jesus said, I am the way the truth and the life. So what would God have us come to know about truth and life in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus this Eastertide? It reminds you of that clever, slightly annoying bumper sticker: Know Jesus, Know God – No Jesus, No God. It's a visual.

In each of today's readings, the scripture calls attention to our human compulsion to figure out with the intellect things that only the heart can know. "How long will you love vain words?" demands the psalmist; "You and your rulers act in ignorance!" explains Peter. "What we will be has not been revealed," reads the letter of John; and "Why do argue with your hearts?" demands Jesus of his disciples before he snags a bite of tilapia out of the fire, proving just how real he is, and how much one of us.

What is this truth that God would have us know in our hearts, the knowledge that has to compete with our continual compulsion to figure out everything, to justify ourselves via intellect, to rationalize who God is by virtue of what we want God to be, to come to the conclusion that our brand of religion is the theological be-all and end-all. What is it God would have us know, despite all this?

One clue is the way Jesus makes every effort to steer, cajole, surprise and chide us from this thinking path. "Oh ye of little faith!" he says. Notice he spent all his time with doubters and sinners. So if that's who we are too, then we are the people God is interested in; not the perfect ones, whoever they may be. "I came to save sinners, not the righteous." Our doubts are not affirmed by Jesus, but our tendency to have them is. We can't

seem to stop veering away from the simple heart-knowledge and love of Christ and must continually remind ourselves and each other that it is here, always, that all we must do is all we can do: turn again and be forgiven.

Let's take the example of our psalm today. In the version we just sang together, and in practically any version we come across, there is an earnest but complicated intellectual effort to synthesize the concepts of the poem. This is just what God is trying so lovingly to get us to stop doing once in awhile. In monastic communities, this psalm is repeated every evening at Vespers, to put an end to the day's maelstrom of thinking and get back to basics. Here's what the monastery version of Psalm 4 sounds like – with your permission, annotated:

“When I call answer me O God of justice, from anguish release me, have mercy and hear me and hear me.” (This is what we want – God as EMT)

“Oh men, how long will your hearts be closed; will you love what is futile and seek what is false?” (Here appears a measure of self-awareness: We can't manage to figure things out on our own.)

“It is the Lord who grants favor to those whom he loves. The Lord hears me whenever I call him.” (And as antidote, there is God-awareness. God can help, every time)

“Fear him, do not sin, ponder on our bed and be still.” (Listen to the Word, follow the precepts. Take the cotton out of your ears and put it in your mouth once in awhile. Only then will we be able to hear what God is trying to tell us.)

“Make justice your sacrifice and trust in the Lord” (What is a sacrifice? Giving up something in order to create the space for something more. Do the just thing, the merciful thing, the humble thing and let go of the result.)

“What can bring us happiness? Many say. Lift up the light of your face on us, O Lord” ‘But, but, but,’ we protest, ‘what about my plans, my agenda, my significance?’ We still want the EMT, but if we have been listening, we have God’s answer, we have all the information about happiness we’ll ever need, for:

“Oh Lord you have given me greater joy, than they have from abundance of corn and new wine.”

And therefore: “I lie down in peace and sleep comes at once, for you alone Lord, make me dwell in safety.”

Thus when Jesus appears to the disciples, he greets them with the word, “Peace.”

This word he uses has such a richness of meaning that we must accept that it passes our understanding. Safety, harmony, prosperity, good health, well-being, and yes, no more war. Around the World, this greeting is repeated, in the same fervent hope that the one we greet will receive the same benefits we want for ourselves. *Shalom Aleichem/Aleichem Sholem; Salaam Aleikum/Aleikum Salaam*; in Asia, *Namasté*; in East Africa, *Hujambo/Sijambo*, and many others, including my favorite from the Wolof of Senegambia, *Jamm ak Jamm*, literally Peace and Peace, which means that we part in peace and live in the hope of coming back together in peace, *Jamm ak Jamm*. To which the reply is *Jamm rekk; Alhamdoulillah!* Peace, only; Thanks be to God!

What is so hard for us to accept is that this peace is for each of us, even though we can never understand it. It will set us free if we cooperate. This is not easy, and Jesus knows it. That's why he spent time with those who were struggling. The truth is God is not on the wane, and the new life of Christ is as relevant as it ever was. But the collective ego of humanity is more deafening than ever too, and the inner voice of faithseeking can seem appallingly inferior in a shouting match.

What we have trouble seeing is that we are utterly free. "To you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God, while for the others outside, everything comes in parables..." We have trouble remembering, believing, knowing that our capacity for faith is built-in, permanent and ineffable. We are not meant to be smug or prideful, but to have the kind of confidence that leaves us free to endlessly explore radically generous strategies of engagement with each other, un-selfconscious hospitality, and all the means of expression we can imagine.

What we cannot ever fully understand even though we can spend our lives trying to enact is the drama described in Robert Bresson's great film *Diary of a Country Priest* like this: "Oh wonder, that one can give what one does not possess – oh miracle of my empty hands!"

Because whatever the issues of our days, it is only with this simple strategy that we will successfully address them: by making justice our sacrifice – our habitual response to life. Only then will God see us go out and return and lie down in Peace. *Jamm ak jamm*. Whether we are making art or celebrating life or taking social action, we will be doing something godly about those issues. And our acts will become

nourishment for the faith sing about and give thanks for. And sleep will come at once when we want it.