

Rev. David Owren
Sermon at Christ Church, Eureka
3rd Sunday of Easter
May 5, 2019
Acts 9:1-6, (7-20)
Psalm 30
Revelation 5:11-14
John 21:1-19

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

People of the Jesus Movement, you are the people of Light! And the risen Christ calls you to change your old ways for new ways.

INTRO

I teach world religions at College of the Redwoods. A few years ago a student in my class shared his story. He was Jewish. He grew up in San Francisco and went to Hebrew school. He learned the language, the traditions and the wisdom of Judaism. He attended Shabbat services, observed all Jewish holy days and celebrated his Bar Mitzvah. As he grew older his enthusiasm for his Jewish heritage began to

wane. Finally he gave it all up and moved away. He said it got to be too much.

But now he was back in school, in my world religions class. He said he wanted to know more about who he was and why he was here. He told me that his grandmother was buried alive in the Holocaust and left for dead....and she was pregnant. But she dug her way out of that grave and gave birth to a baby boy, who became his father. My student wanted to know more about the miracle of his father's birth. He wanted to know why the grave could not hold his grandmother. He wondered why he was given the light of life from the darkness of death.

GOAL

On this 3rd Sunday of Easter, you and I celebrate because Jesus broke out of the darkness of the grave to give us the light of new life. And we wonder too,

how and why this happened. What does it mean to be resurrected? How then, shall we live?

In the readings today we have some clues.

Saul, on his way to capture people of “The Way”, is blinded by heavenly light. Jesus appears to Saul and asks a question, “Why do you persecute me?” This is followed up by a command to get up and go. Transformed from persecutor of Christians to proclaimer of the Gospel, He is given a new name and a new life. Now Paul becomes blind to his old ways and is given sight for new ways. He changed his old ways for new ways.

Jesus appears to the disciples who have caught no fish. At Jesus’ command they cast their net on the other side of the boat and their net was full of fish. Then Jesus invites them to breakfast, sharing bread and fish, around the light of a charcoal fire. Perhaps a reminder of the Last Supper. Finally, Jesus asks the

same question three times, “Simon...do you love me? And three times Simon Peter replies that he loves him. Perhaps a reminder of the three times Simon Peter denied Jesus. Then Jesus adds three commands, “Feed my sheep, tend my sheep, feed my sheep.”

Saul, now Paul, and Peter, now “the Rock”, have new names and new lives. Old ways give way to new ways as they follow the risen Christ on journeys they never planned to experiences they never imagined, and ultimately to deaths they never predicted. But as Jesus people, Paul and Peter proclaim the Good News of God’s love and forgiveness. They join with the psalmist today praising God for deliverance from enemies, for restoring health, and for rescue from the grave. They see the vision of the slaughtered Lamb, now alive and worthy of the seven honors usually given to a Roman emperor, whose red blood has made

them white as snow. This is such Good News that all of creation sings a song of adoration.

Does this sound like your life? Jesus always calls us to new beginnings. Like Paul we are called to stop killing Jesus and start being Jesus. Like Peter, we are called to leave our predictable patterns and discover unpredictable opportunities. As our presiding Bishop says, "Being a Christian is not essentially about joining a church or being a nice person, but about following in the footsteps of Jesus, taking his teachings seriously, letting his Spirit take the lead in our lives, and in so doing helping to change the world from our nightmare into God's dream."ⁱ

MALADY

Henri Nouwen wrote in his book, In The Name of Jesus, "...it seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people, easier to own life than to love life."ⁱⁱ

We live in a world where the darkness of polarization, violence and despair surround us. Often we get used to the shadows of complacency, neglect and status quo. And on a really "bad hair day" we despair and ask the hopeless question, "What can one person do?"

There is a story of a wife who put a little plaque in the kitchen that said "PRAYER CHANGES THINGS." Twenty-four hours later it was gone. She went to her husband and asked, "What is wrong? Don't you like prayer?" to which he replied, "Oh, I like prayer. I don't like change."

Change is tough. It moves us out of our comfort zone. And we don't like it. But Jesus is always calling us out of our comfort zones! What grave do you need to dig out of today? What is keeping you in darkness? What prevents you from seeing light and new life?

MEANS

Barbara Brown Taylor wrote in her book, An Altar in the World: “Every human interaction offers you the chance to make things better or to make things worse.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Example...Esther Terrell was the widow of the Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court. When her husband died she was devastated. She said, “...there were days when I could not get out of bed. I was so down. I didn’t know what to do with my life. One day, I got a call from the Red Cross, saying they needed my blood type. Would I come and give blood? Well, I couldn’t refuse. I got up and went to the Red Cross.

The person who checked me in was a stranger. But in the process of talking to me, she said, ‘You know, you’re just the kind of person we need here at the Red Cross. I can see it when you smile. You have a pretty smile, and you know how to greet people.

Giving blood is sometimes frightening for people. Would you consider coming and being a volunteer here at the blood center?’”

Esther Terrell volunteered every day at the Red Cross, well into her 90s. She said, “...that stranger changed my life. I think it was a call from God.”^{iv}

Esther’s life was transformed, and in turn, she transformed so many other lives that her story is still being told today in Tallahassee, Florida.

People of the Jesus movement, we need to listen to the experiences of Paul, and Peter, and Esther ...these witnesses to the power of Jesus’ resurrection. These people of light changed old ways for new ways.

We are baptized people who have died with Christ and now have new life through Christ’s resurrected, transforming presence. When you are devastated, when you feel empty, when you have failed, when you think you have nothing to offer

anybody...remember the one who has promised never to fail you, but to be always with you.^v He is the one who will give you strength when you are weak, faith when you doubt, hope when you despair, and love when you hate.

In a world that promotes identity instead of integrity and polarization instead of cooperation it is easy to play the blame game. But Jesus, the risen Christ, does not call us to play the blame game. He calls us to follow Him on the ever-new path of love. Giving ourselves to others, serving others, loving others as Jesus did. Jesus calls us to change our old ways for new ways. As the author Madeleine L'Engle put it: "We draw people to Christ not by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it."

In his first address as Presiding Bishop and Primate of The Episcopal Church, our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry said, "This is the Jesus Movement, and we are The Episcopal Church, the Episcopal branch of Jesus' movement in this world."

Come today and be nourished by the holy sacrament named "thanks!"^{vi} Pray each day for our presiding bishop Michael, our retiring bishop Barry, our bishop-elect Megan, pray for Fr. Daniel and for the entire Jesus movement around the world. Love and care for each other. Always welcome the stranger. And be on the alert for new, unexpected ways to be the good news to those who so desperately need some good news. You are called to get up and go; follow Jesus and be the light that displaces darkness. Remember, the grave could not hold Jesus, who says to you and me today, "I came not to judge you, but to save you. Follow me"

SUMMA

Ernest Hemingway once made a bet that he could write a story in six words. His friend took the bet, because he knew that no one could write a story in six words that would have any emotional impact or importance. Hemingway pulled out a piece of paper and wrote these six words: “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.”

We are not all Hemingway, but we can tell the greatest story ever told story with just three words: “He is risen!” People of the Jesus Movement, people of Light, we have been raised with Him. “He is risen indeed!” Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ⁱ Michael Curry, *Crazy Christians: A Call to Follow Jesus*

ⁱⁱ Quoted by Daniel Clendenin, "A Fire of Burning Coals", *Journey With Jesus*[webzine], April 3, 2016.

ⁱⁱⁱ Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*

^{iv} James Harnish, "Reflections on the Lectionary," *Christian Century*, April 6, 2010, p. 21.

^v FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS "BREAKFAST ON THE BEACH" Scripture Lessons: Jeremiah 32:6-15; John 21:1-19 This sermon was preached by Dr. Joseph S. Harvard III on Sunday, April 10, 2016 at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

^{vi} "I have come to think that the moment of giving the bread of Eucharist as gift is the quintessential center of the notion of Sabbath rest in Christian tradition. It is gift! We receive in gratitude. Imagine having a sacrament named "thanks"! We are on the receiving end, without accomplishment, achievement, or qualification. It is a gift, and we are grateful! That moment of gift is a peaceable alternative that many who are "weary and heavy-laden, cumbered with a load of care" receive gladly. The offer of free gift, faithful to Judaism, might let us learn enough to halt the dramatic anti-neighborliness to which our society is madly and uncritically committed." – **Walter Brueggemann, Sabbath as Resistance**: