

Sermon – Easter 2010

by The Venerable Dr. Lorne Mitchell, Rector of St. James Church, Stratford

I speak to you in the name of God, the Author of all life, the Creator and Redeemer of all that has been, all that is, and all that is to come. Amen.

Deep Truth.

That is what Easter is all about. It's not about magical events or even miracles per se. Easter is about deep and profound Truth. The kind of truth that has the ability to shake us right down to core of our soul; the kind of truth that can change how we see ourselves and the world.

All throughout Lent and Holy week, there was a trusty band of committed parishioners who met with me every Tuesday night to study a book called Tokens of Trust. The book is written by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, and offers some wonderful reflections on the Creeds – both the apostle's creed and the Nicene Creed. On the first Tuesday we met, I asked them to identify some questions that they wanted to address during our study. Among the questions offered were the following...

Where did the creeds come from? Why are there two? What language were they written in? Where did they get their authority? Do all Christian churches use the creeds?

But then of course there was the big question:

Do we have to take the creeds literally in order to be Christian? Ah. So here we get to the nitty gritty stuff. Fortunately, in his book, the Archbishop doesn't back away from this kind of question and so the discussion was easy to have.

Rowan talks very well about the character of biblical belief. He would say that belief in the biblical sense is not the same as the way we use the word in casual conversation. He would say that believing in God is not in the same category as believing in the Loch Ness monster – or believing in aliens. This is because to believe in God in the biblical sense is to refer to a relationship. The Biblical sense of belief is more like - I trust, or I have confidence in, or I take refuge in, the God who has made everything. This kind of belief has a strong sense of relationship with the other.

In our reading from Acts which we hear every Easter Sunday, Peter is speaking to Cornelius the Centurion, the gentile, who has just asked to hear the good news that Peter has been preaching. Peter describes Jesus ministry, his death and resurrection and then concludes by saying that,

“everyone who **believes** in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

It's important to remember that what Peter is saying here did not come out of a theology class or a text book. What Peter is talking about came out of an intensely powerful personal experience. This sense of being completely and totally released from all one's sins in the presence of the risen Jesus was experienced by Peter, Paul and many others - and they all struggled to find the words that would convey this experience to others. They wanted others to feel the awesome sense of freedom, love and joy that they had experienced. Using Archbishop Rowan's insight, it would seem that Peter was saying that "... if I put my full trust in Jesus; if I have full confidence in him; if I take refuge in Jesus then I will experience that awesome sense of freedom, love and joy.

One evening during our Lenten Study Group I asked people to think of someone you have had a very close relationship with... someone you know very well... someone you've shared many activities with... It might be a marriage relationship, or a friendship, or a parent-child relationship - someone close... Now I would venture to guess that for whoever you are thinking of, there have probably been times when that relationship went a bit sour. Relationships make life meaningful and satisfying, but they're far from smooth sailing... Perhaps there was a fight, or perhaps a misunderstanding, or perhaps an emotional distance that has grown through a variety of circumstances.

Now the question that I would like to ask is this, What does it take to mend a relationship? There are certain things that are needed. What are they?

When I asked our Lenten group, they said that it first of all takes a **desire** on at least one side to try to mend it. They also said that it usually means one side taking some **initiative**. Someone has to take the first step they said. And this takes some **courage**. To mend a relationship means stepping into a place of being **vulnerable**. A person has to sacrifice certain things. A person has to give up a bit of **pride**. Give up that sense of total **rightness**. To mend a relationship usually takes giving up some **power** and at the same time being ready to **forgive**. Not everyone is able to do all this, and it doesn't always get mended.

I want you to think about this for a moment... because what I have just described **is exactly what Jesus Christ is all about**. It took the early disciples very little time at all to realize what had just taken place. The relationship with God that the Hebrew people had had over the years was limited and there were times of great distance in the relationship. The prophets over the years had written about how God had a strong desire to be more closely knit with the people. The Christian disciples saw Jesus' coming into the world as a **clear sign of God's desire to take the initiative**. It was going to take an enormous amount of **courage**, because mending and deepening the relationship between God and God's people was going to mean Jesus stepping into a

place of vulnerability. It was going to mean that he lay down whatever power he might have while at the same time being ready to pronounce forgiveness to one and all. In the end the sacrifice that would have to be made would be absolute.

The disciples who knew Jesus and experienced his life, death and resurrection were absolutely convinced that this is precisely the reason why Jesus had come into their world – to take the initiative of mending and strengthening our relationship with God. And in so doing inviting us into a new reality – a Kingdom of God that was breaking into this world.

The resurrection is not a miracle per se – that word is too weak, too flimsy – it is more like a cosmic event that when experienced makes possible a radical new kind of existence. An existence where somehow you know that you are a citizen of heaven **now** ... not some time in the future... not sometime down the road... but now. This is who you are.

The Deep Truth of the Resurrection is that a totally self-giving love, freely offered for the sake of others, is not something that can be destroyed; A sacrificial love of that magnitude cannot be killed. A thunderous *Alleluia!* breaks the silence...

When the Divine Love in human form collided head on with the horrible fears and hate of the human world – something incredible and transformative and life giving was bound to happen. The reality of Christ could not be contained. Deep truth exploded into the world. New life burst out in every direction. People had visions. Roman Centurions had dreams. People felt his real and continued presence with them. Lives were changed. And disciples like Peter realized that the world had changed. People like Cornelius wanted to hear the story and it would change their lives too.

As Rowan Williams says in his book, “When we celebrate the Resurrection we are celebrating the ‘Second Big Bang of the universe’” – a second Creation Moment for All Humanity. We have all been invited into that moment, and so you and I have been called to be apostles of hope to our current age. I feel that deeply. And so I am compelled to confess that:

Jesus is my Lord and saviour,
My teacher, my master and my friend,
I put my full trust in what he has revealed to us
So let us receive and spread with joy
the hope and new life he offers to all of us.

INFSHS. Amen.