

Year "A" Proper 17 - 3 September 2017
Saint Barnabas Church
Bainbridge Island, Washington

God's people longed for the Messiah.

The Messiah would free the enslaved, feed and clothe the poor, visit those in prison and heal the sick. Social recovery and stability! He would restore pure and holy temple practice and lift legal religious burdens. Religious freedom! He would be a warrior/king who would defeat the Romans occupying their land and oppressing them. Political and civic freedom! The messiah would restore and elevate the Jewish people to their rightful place so they may indeed be a light to enlighten the nations.

When Peter said he believed Jesus to be the messiah, Jesus told him he was correct. As Messiah, he said, he would suffer, die, be buried and be raised from the dead. Oh, no!

Peter experienced the awful side of awe. He encountered something extraordinary in Jesus and that encounter upended all his assumptions about the way the world works.

Do we long for a messiah? What kind?? When I proclaim "Jesus is Messiah," what do you think?

Do you think "Jesus is the kindly teacher who reminds us the great commandment is to love God with all our heart, our soul and our mind and our neighbor as ourselves?"

Do you think "Jesus is a traditional Jewish prophet who exhorts us to care for the poor, widows, orphans, for all who are judged unacceptable?"

Do you think "Jesus called us to repent of sins and be restored to wholeness of life?"

Do you think of Jesus, the compassionate healer, performed miracles? Are you in need of a miracle worker who will save you from the consequences of your bad luck or bad decisions, of your failure to live as you think you should? Are you in need of a savior whom you can really trust to save you from emotional and physical pain and suffering, one who can heal your brokenness?

Would you say Jesus was the best example ever known of how to be human?

Can you go further and proclaim him the unique Son of God, Lord of all creation?

I know men, women, and children who confess "Jesus is Lord" with certainty and conviction.

I know others who, however sincerely they endeavor to follow the Jesus Way, find it difficult to say with integrity: "Jesus is Lord." "Jesus is God."

Our expectations are modest. We think and we think and we miss the incredible awesome emotion felt by Moses before the burning bush, and by Peter when he looked on Jesus.

We are people of a time and culture who seek to understand and to explain. We can understand and explain the solstice. We can experience profound emotion, moved by awe at the extraordinary experience of the solstice. Can we explain a dying and rising Lord? With the help of Robert Capon, Tom Wright, and T. S. Eliot we will try.

In the opening lines of his poem "The Four Quartets," T. S. Eliot called the crucifixion of Jesus the still small point, the turning point in history after which everything is changed.

Paul quoted an early tradition professing the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus were the decisive events in which the great scriptural story reached its climax. Early Christians affirmed that "the resurrection," the great hope of Israel, had happened in a way nobody had imagined.

The Jesus events are the turning point in history. They took place in an historic time in an historic place. A relatively obscure death in history has had cosmic implications. In these events, God has given us a New Creation.

God has given us a sign that God's mercy is greater than God's justice. God in Jesus has given us a sign that God's Kingdom is here! - all around us. Everything about how we think the world works is changed.

Jesus' life, death and resurrection is not a pay back for sin. God doesn't keep score. Jesus is an acted-out parable, a sign to trust confidently in God's gracious love for each and all. Jesus is a sacrifice because he is the most beautiful, most fully actualized human being we humans can offer God - and he was willing to be that offering. Like Jesus, we are known and accepted, even loved, by God.

Julian of Norwich wrote: "What, do you wish to know your Lord's meaning in this thing? Know it well, love was his meaning.
Who reveals it to you? Love.
What did he reveal to you? Love.
Why does he reveal it to you? For Love."

When we humble ourselves and acknowledge this gracious love, we are overwhelmed by amazement . . . incredulity . . . awe.

But just what is a resurrection body? It is neither a resuscitated nor a reanimated body. The resurrected body possesses both continuity and discontinuity with its past. Jesus told a story about a seed. The seed is placed in the ground and covered with earth. Later a green shoot emerges and grows into a plant. The plant grows from the seed yet it is a different sort of thing. The resurrected Jesus has both continuity and discontinuity with the man who walked the dusty roads of Israel and Galilee.

If you dissect a caterpillar pupa very carefully, you can reveal the body and wings of the butterfly it will become. What is in you and me, waiting to be revealed?

The resurrection body is the transformation of the existing body into a new mode of physicality. Paul describes it as the difference between a body animated by "soul" (the present natural body which will die and decay) and a body animated by God's "spirit." The "spirit animated" body will possess a quality of life that transcends our present decaying existence.

Whether or not we understand - at least to some extent - the explanation of the life, death and resurrection, we can experience the emotion of this New Creation. Robert Capron said it is as if there is an ongoing dance in the universe. T.S. Elliot said if it were not for "the still point of the turning world, there would be no dance."

God continually reaches out to us and invites us to dance, to dance the Mystery of Christ, to dance the mystery of transformed transcendent life. We are invited to live our lives in God, in the Dance of the Trinity.

Jesus is the Lord of the dance. He leads us. He goes before us. We dance to love our enemies. We dance our way through many little deaths and on into the final death. We dance to lose our lives in order to gain true life, to follow Jesus into resurrection, into a mystic sweet communion with God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

We bow, we skip, we circle, we leap and we stumble. Sometimes we twirl at a rapid joyous pace and sometimes we dance slowly, thoughtfully, sometimes our steps are sorrowful. We trust the music is playing and we trust the dance is being danced. It is as if we allow ourselves to do a trust fall off the stage into the orchestra pit – falling into the arms of Jesus instead of into the arms of strangers. We don't see the musicians who pipe and fiddle and drum for us – but we trust they are there.

The job of Christians is to dance to the gracious music of the Trinity for the joy of our dancing awakens the world. “Come to the party,” we call. “Dance with us.” The boundary between the self and the rest of the world blurs. In the dance we gain a sense of connection, a sense of oneness with “I Am” while still maintaining our own unique selves.

The dance is graceful – because it is Grace . We dance for God and with God and in God. God in us and we in God. We are a resurrected people. We dance a New Creation. Awesome!

Bow down in awe before the Lord!