

St. John's Episcopal Church
Hamlin, Pennsylvania
The Rev'd Ronald Royce Miller, Ph.D.
Easter Day
5 April 2015

Scripture readings:

Acts 10:34-43

Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24

I Corinthians 15:1-11

John 20:1-18

Somewhere between 1969 and 1971 a man by the name of David Granskou who taught New Testament at the Lutheran Seminary in Chicago challenged my thinking by asking us to imagine that the bones of Jesus were archaeologically discovered and there was no physical resurrection of the body. Now at the age of twenty-something - yes, I was that age once [*laughter*] - that wasn't anything I had ever thought about, and maybe you haven't either. My question is: suppose we had those bones right here. Would that make a difference to your faith and how you celebrate Easter? Well, I certainly hope not.

I'm afraid that too much attention to that kind of suspension of the natural order leads us into thinking and religious ideas that become, in fact, irrelevant. I remember as a child asking my mother would I die. I had a very good mother, as you know, and she said, "*Yes, dear, but not today.*"

I guess at this end of Lent and the beginning of Easter we need to consider what it is we practiced thinking about for forty days before Easter about our participation in the assassination of God as the Church comes to claim Jesus as a part of the godhead. It takes a while but we get there. If you don't think it's complicated wait til we get to the creed after the sermon. The first paragraph about God the Father is easy, the last one about the Holy Spirit and the Church is easy, but it takes a big fat middle paragraph for the Church to try and explain what it is we've come to believe about Jesus. Well, that was written in the fourth century and I hope some thinking has gone on since the year 325 and continues to go on among us.

What does it mean to celebrate that Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia. Well, if it's about a Jew who died 2000 years ago, period, we are a sad mess as a bunch of people. If resurrection is not something we celebrate as a daily reality in our lives and if our participation in the life of the Church of Jesus Christ as baptized members of a community of people who believe something, if that doesn't imply an understanding of what it is we celebrated in Christmas called the incarnation that involves each of us in that incarnation, I firmly believe we have missed the point entirely. It's easy for us to do rockabye baby Jesus - Oh, God is incarnate in Jesus, Jewish baby 2000 years ago. Christmas is over, back in the shoe box up in the attic and collecting dust for another year. Whoopee! Easter lilies. *Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed.* Next week the lilies are all dead and if you're into the bodily resurrection of Jesus, period, O.K. so you've remembered that event which is 2000 years stale, what in the world difference does it make in your life? Big Whoopee.

I have this creeping suspicion no matter what you believe about Jesus, whether or not you believe he was part of the Trinity, whether or not you believe he was just a Jewish prophet, whether or not you believe he was physically raised from the dead - none of that matters to me in what I want to think with you about this morning. Have we paid attention to his message? Skip all the junk about Jesus. Have we heard what Jesus had to say? Because what Jesus had to say was such a radical

message that the people around him killed him for it. It was that threatening, and it threatened religious people, it threatened political people, it threatened Wall Street, it threatened the military-industrial complex, and it threatened them so much that they who hated each other colluded to assassinate this guy. Not because he had weapons. We know he didn't. Not because he had money. We know he was poor. Not because he was politically correct or incorrect and not because he had anything other than an idea. And not a very complicated idea. A very simple idea that God loved him and that God loved every other rotten louse in the world. Period. That simple.

The religious institution couldn't tolerate it because they were in the business of buying and selling the love of God. They were in the business of scaring the be-jabbers out of people. If you didn't do it right, God was angry with you. They were in the business of selling you the right sacrifice so that you could burn this thing and it would go up God's nose and that would make God happy. What kind of God is that?

The political institution didn't like it because people were talking about Jesus as King of the Jews. Well, that's seditious, that's insurrection, that's contrary to the civil authority. Couldn't have that!

Wall Street didn't like it because he said the poor would inherit the earth, that you didn't have to have money to have power or be important to be loved by God. This message was radical. You know where the word "radical" comes from? Anybody know what a radish is? *Radix*, the Latin word which means "a root" - the word we get radish from. Radical means cutting to the root of the issue.

Jesus' message skipped all of the junk and went right to the root of something that he grasped and believed fully and completely for and about himself - that he was loved fully by God. And hypocrisy never entered the picture for Jesus because he said, "*If God can love me this completely, God can love everyone else God has created completely and, in fact, does.*"

Jesus' religious development only consists, I believe, in one page - the first page of holy scripture. Last night at the Easter Vigil... You know vigils are about technicalities. The idea is that you come to church and you sit around until the stroke of midnight so at the stroke of midnight you can celebrate the first mass of Easter. First is best, right? Well, guess what, gang - you're third on the list today. *[laughter]* We had a vigil last night. Eight o'clock came and went. You're late. So if you're going to use that as a brownie point, it's not going to work.

The technicality of a vigil is you sit around and wait until midnight and while we wait in the Easter Vigil we recount the history of salvation. So a part of the reading of the stories of the sacrifice of Isaac and the Flood and all the rest of it, the first lesson we read was the account of creation. In the beginning God creates the heaven, the earth, everybody in it, and God stands back from God's creation and looks at it and says, "*I love it!*" And never in scripture is there really an indication that God ever changes her mind about that. "*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I would have gathered you under my wing as a hen gathers her chicks*" - the words of Jesus.

So Jesus says, "*I believe the first page of the Bible,*" and everybody gets upset. And he really believed it to the point that when people were so upset and he surely understood they were plotting

to take his life - and not just the bad guys - the good guys, his closest friends. You know you can't be betrayed by an enemy. When an enemy does you in, that's what you expect of an enemy. It's only those who can get close enough to you to kiss you who can betray you. Jesus is abandoned by the last of his best friends to the idea that he is loved by God and even so are they the traitors, the assassins, the spear jabbers, the nail drivers, the snot spitters, the hand slappers, the thorn crown plaiters, the sinners.

And so he goes to his death - and let's get this straight - not because God demands propitiation for our sins. He goes to his death because people are nasty, ugly, sinful, hateful and violent, and they kill him because he has a message of God's love, pure and simple.

So what's this resurrection from the dead all about? It's about people - you and me and the rest of the people who call themselves the Church. It's about people who say, "*O.K., he had something right and we believe it.*"

And we also might say, we don't have what Jesus had to do what Jesus did by ourselves but together we can believe, teach and encourage each other about this divine love which is way greater than my love, about this divine sense of justice which is way greater than my sense of justice, about this divine sense of economic equality which is way greater than my sense of economic equality, about this sense of human beings and their affection for others and amongst others which is way better than my ability to tolerate how God works in the world, is different from how I, this tiny little pinched creature, try to live in the world. But I become a larger creature when I'm connected to you. And so St. Paul develops this idea that those who remember Jesus and believe things about Jesus and his message become an organization which is called the Church which he then says the Church is the body of Christ. And if Christ is going to be raised from the dead today and the world is going to see Christ, they're going to see Christ where Christ has flesh and blood. And that's not dead bones, and it's not a hairy fairy body in the sky somewhere. It has to do with that sack of flesh and blood that you saw stark naked when you stepped out of the shower this morning. God will be seen in you and in us as we align ourselves with that absolutely radical idea that we are loved by God and we firmly believe that if God can love us God can love anybody. How's that for a confession? You've heard of a face only a mother could love. How about a sinner only a mother could love?

And when God loves us and we accept that love then it isn't a job, it isn't a task, it isn't a duty, it isn't the business of earning God's love or returning anything to God. It's the business, in fact, of being God incarnate as the Church and simply living life as Jesus lived it in God's love and sharing God's love. Then, in fact, Christ will be risen indeed every day amongst us and with us and by us and for us.

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

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