

## Sermon Summary April 11, 2010

The scripture reading we shared earlier is a continuation of the events of the first day of the week when Mary and the disciples found the tomb empty. At a gathering later that evening, Jesus appeared to the group while Thomas was not present. We all know the story of “doubting Thomas”, he refused to believe that Jesus had risen from the tomb unless he could actually see and touch him.

Dealing with doubt is a part of being human, particularly when it involves the realm of the spiritual. How do we know that Jesus really rose from death and appeared to the disciples? The short answer is, “we can’t really know, from a strictly human perspective.” Paul’s letters to the various churches, the earliest written documents we have, refer to the risen Christ, but not to the specific event of the resurrection that the gospels refer to. We are left with a confused notion about who Jesus is: a risen savior, or a notable, but totally human teacher.

In the end, we have to realize that words can only be finite ways of pointing to the infinite. What humans seek in religious involvement is to experience a sense of the transcendent, an experience of something beyond the confines of controllable human existence. John Spong and many others have pointed this out for the past 20 years. If we take a literal understanding of the Bible, believing that all the stories are true, factual accounts of events, then we are faced with a question: “does this interpretation help me to gain an experience of the transcendent”, or is it simply explaining an event in humanly definable terms? To me, that tends to negate the transcendent experience we are seeking, and only reinforces the human control we are trying to move beyond. If we give metaphoric interpretation to the resurrection, are we left with anything more than a “good story?” In this case, Greek mythology might be more helpful in understanding the nature of being. If we look at the Gospels through the lense of 20<sup>th</sup> century historical criticism, we eliminate everything that is not provable, either from a scientific or literary view, and are left with Jesus as simply a “great teacher.” But, why limit great moral and ethical teachers to one person when we have the likes of Ghandi, Bonhoeffer and even

Mother Theresa as well as many others? Do any of these help to move us into an experience of transcendence? And, why is this experience of the transcendent so important for human existence?

I would venture that hope is the primary reason for the human longing after transcendence. When all is said and done in our human lives, we realize that we have very little control over our fears and longings, to say nothing of death. We can manipulate our cognition to control our emotion, but we can't change the concrete finality of the physical world and how that world affects us each day. To know that there is something beyond human frailty brings a sense of hope to our days and nights. In the words of Kenneth J. McFayden, "hope hears the music of the future". We see beyond the temporal to an actual experience of the goodness of God. Sometimes those experiences of emotion combined with spiritual longing work themselves out best in the ways of poetry, music and art. To describe the resurrection using one of these non-linear methods of expression can help us to move a little closer to that experience of transcendent hope.

With only a little jest, I'd venture that the transcendent music of hope brings a different reaction according to how we are interpreting scripture. Biblical literalism hears the hopeful music of the future and plugs its ears with its fingers. When confronted with the challenge to adjust our understanding of life due to the possibility that God has something new or different to introduce, we sometimes react by fearfully rejecting what God has to offer. On the other hand, when the metaphoric hears the hopeful music of the future, a discussion ensues about "what type of music is this?" Is it a concerto or a fugue, is it rock or reggae, and all the while hope stands jilted in the corner, waiting for a partner to bring its gift to life. We could venture to guess what historical-critical interpretation does with the hopeful music of the future, but decency demands that we guard our eyes and ears from the horror of an academic execution of the vibrancy of note and lyric.

“Hope hears the music of the future.” The other half of McFayden’s poetry gives us the only response to the story of the resurrection that can offer meaning: “and faith dances to that music.” The understanding of life is something that is beyond human ability, but giving meaning to life is the call of the sacred that comes to each one of us in the hopeful dance that faith invites us to join in. Our steps may be clumsy, our timing a little off, but we can lose our inhibitions only when we venture out into the swirling, joyous music of creation, and recreation, and truly live.