

Easter

Mark 16:1-8

"And they went out and fled from the tomb, for fear and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone..."

They did, though, say something, or else you and I would not be here today. But the question remains, what do **you** say about Jesus' resurrection?

So much has been written and said that you would think we understand.

I believe the Resurrection changed in the history of the world. But it is not understandable, except to say that Jesus love is now not confined to one place and time, to one person, but spreads everywhere; most of all through those people who follow him wherever he is: Galilee, Burlington, Ascension Lutheran church.

Does it matter?

Let me squarely challenge you in this age when everything is relative and nothing really true: It matters enormously what you believe, about yourself and the world, about resurrection.

"A family went out to a restaurant for dinner. When the waitress arrived, the parents gave their orders. Immediately their five-year-old daughter piped up with her own: 'I'll have a hot dog, French fries and a Coke.' 'O no you won't,' interjected the dad, and turning to the waitress he said, 'She'll have meat loaf, mashed potatoes, and milk.' Looking at the child with a smile, the waitress said, 'So, hon, what do you want on that hot dog?' When she left, the family sat stunned and silent. A few moments later the little girl, eyes shining, said, 'She thinks I'm real.'" (*Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha*, by Tara Brach, p. 12-13).

Jesus makes us real!

Jesus' followers were nobodies; they had just witnessed his murder; but he returned to them; and they became leaders of a movement that has made more difference to the world than anything else in history.

He believed in them and trusted himself to them, during his earthy life. And then after his death, people who were nobodies become leaders, really real.

Jesus is not in the tomb; it is empty.

"Trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

But they overcame their fear and did say much; and people are still speaking and overcoming their fears.

A man lost his job and felt worthless but the church prayer circle gave him back his sense of

dignity and worth in living. A downtown Lutheran church, saw that people were using the food pantry more and determined to do something: they overcame their fears and spoke to their legislators for a living wage. People in our own congregation have changed jobs and endured salary cuts to follow their Christian conscience. People in our church community make it a point to pray for others even though struggling with illness themselves.

It therefore matters enormously whether you say yes to following the risen Jesus into Galilee, or wherever he might go, to Vermont, or S. Burlington, for that matter even into our own hearts.

And, say Yes, day by day because it is not a one-time answer to his question, will you follow me...God's grace gives you the faith to say yes.

Now you and I know very well that religion has a pretty bad reputation of making people self-righteous, thinking they have all the answers, so that seeming to be religious can be embarrassing. Being Christian is sometimes one of the last things we would want to admit about ourselves to people at work, at school, to friends.

But, it helps to remember that Jesus is a leader who was not self-righteous, but kind, humorous, breaking down the boundaries of who ate with whom and questioning the way the world worked. He was crucified not because he asked people to love each other (although he did do that), but because he set people questioning the way the world works, the power structures humans set up to keep things in human—not godly--order. One person who heard him told another about the kingdom of God coming on earth as in heaven; and soon crowds of his followers began to feel free and act as such, so that Jesus seemed dangerous to the powers, they didn't know what might happen, so they tried to silence him and create fear...But they didn't succeed...

Christianity is a relationship with a living person, Jesus Christ, who says, follow me, you are real. Decide what is real; and I will help you do that! The world needs healing, and I need you...

A scene from the start of his ministry tells us how Jesus understood his calling, and we can see ours. In the synagogue, he reads from Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus then lived and taught and healed on the basis of hope, of God's coming realm, of change; which looked like this: he shares bread and wine with the strangers to high society,

misfits, women; and it looks like this: a Son, who had squandered his Father's wealth and on returning home, has his speech already for his dad so that he can eat well again, at home, but way before he can say it, his Father is running to him with open arms; and then his Father calls all the neighbors and the wine and food, and the band, and suddenly there is a party and no time even to make a speech.

Or like this: When Jesus is asked who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, he reaches for a child in the crowd and says unless you become like a child, you really won't get into that particular kingdom of heaven.

Jesus gave his greatest theological conversation, about himself as living water, to a woman at a well, at midday, when no respectful man would talk to a woman that way.

Jesus wasn't really respectable in the way we think of religious respectability.

Some were drawn and felt healed and empowered: the woman at the well became the first preacher; a lame man at the pool, who couldn't get into the water for his healing because so many people were coming in and out, complained to Jesus, who basically said take you mat and walk, and so he did.

So, here it is: a decision:

Jesus says, will you follow me: you will be part of a great adventure, you will know that you are real, you will feel true freedom and joy, but also fear, because following me will cause you to risk and to question the world as it is and see its darkness; you may lose friends, but you will also meet some great people; your heart will be broken and mended time and again, you will be sad because you'll feel for a world in distress, high on consumerism, for just one example, which tends to desecrate my Father's world, and makes people much more selfish, anxious, and afraid than they need to be, but you'll get clearer on what is important; amidst all the confusion you'll have more experiences, where you just feel deep down (with a catch in your throat), that you and everything around you is a gift, meant to be shared; you'll have wisdom beyond your years.

And, more, you'll have a life that's full and abundant and meaningful and that somehow has to do with the deepest of truths about who you really are. Your real identity, your real name. Sometimes your heart will expand and your eyes fill with tears, because you will know the joy of deep, cosmic, joyful laughter of God's joy and grace.

Will you (will I) follow me?