

Third Sunday of Easter

April 15, 2018

By: The Rev. Linda J. Ferguson

Acts 3: 12-19

Psalm 4

1 John 3: 1-7

Luke 24: 36b-48

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Are our eyes deceiving us? Could it possibly be the Lord? The Apostles were nothing less than terrified and startled to find the Lord once again in their midst. When will we ever learn? When will we finally get it, that no walls, no doors, no human inventions can remove Him from our lives. Nothing can remove God. Nothing can ever replace Him. The Lord is real. He has not been invented. We have been invented!

Today's Gospel account reminds me of an article I had recently read titled: "The Archbishop writes to Lulu, age 6, about God." The article is about when journalist, Alex Renton's six-year-old daughter, Lulu, wrote a letter to God and how the journalist did his best to get her an answer.

Alex Renton, an English journalist, wrote that his six year old daughter came home from school one afternoon with an assignment. She had to write a letter to God. The little girl sat down and wrote, "To God how did you get invented? From Lulu ox"

Poor Alex could not write the response. You see, he is a devout atheist. Neither could his wife. So instead of making something up, he asked the experts. He sent his daughter's letter to the Episcopalians and the Presbyterians, but they never replied.

He also sent the letter to the Scottish Catholic Church and to Lambeth Palace, home of the Archbishop of Canterbury. He states that Monsignor Paul Conroy, of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Scotland, wrote the following: "My reply would be along the lines of "God is like us - he wasn't invented - but unlike us he has always been there. God

is like someone we've always loved - we don't remember when he came into our lives because like the people we love who have been there all our lives it's as if we can't imagine what it would be like without him.”

Alex thought, “It's not bad,” but a little heavy for a six year old to read.

Lambeth Palace waited a couple of weeks and then asked Alex to wait a couple of more weeks because someone special was going to write to her. It was the Archbishop himself who wrote a beautiful response. It is a touching example of how an Anglican Bishop can humble himself and take the time to write a letter in response to a little girl's quest for truth. Here is his response.

Your dad has sent on your letter and asked if I have any answers. It's a difficult one! But I think God might reply a bit like this.

Dear Lulu - Nobody invented me - but lots of people discovered me and were quite surprised. They discovered me when they looked round at the world and thought it was really beautiful or really mysterious and wondered where it came from. They discovered me when they were very very quiet on their own and felt a sort of peace and love they hadn't expected.

Then they invented ideas about me - some of them sensible and some of them not very sensible. From time to time I sent them some hints - especially in the life of Jesus - to help them get closer to what I'm really like.

But there was nothing and nobody around before me to invent me. Rather like somebody who writes a story in a book, I started making up the story of the world and eventually invented human beings like you who could ask me awkward questions!

And then he would send you lots of love and sign off.

I know he doesn't usually write letters, so I have to do the best I can on his behalf.

Lots of love from me too. + Archbishop Rowan

“I was touched, more than I would have imagined,” Alex Renton wrote. “My doubts about religion, and my negativity about the Anglican Church, didn’t dissolve, but these things were quite easily put to the side in the face of the Archbishop’s kindness and wisdom.”

“Well done, Archbishop Rowan!” declared my mother when I forwarded the e-mail to her. I agreed. Respects to the Archbishop, a charming, gentle man.

It’s not enough that the tomb is empty. It’s not enough to proclaim, “Christ is risen!” It’s not enough to believe in the resurrection. At some point we have to move from the event of the resurrection to experiencing the resurrection. Experiencing resurrected life begins with recognizing the risen Christ among us. That is the gift of Easter and it is also the difficulty and challenge described in today’s gospel.

With Jesus’ resurrection, however, God shatters human categories of who God is, where God’s life and energy are to be found, and how God works in this world. Resurrected life can never be comprehended, contained, or controlled by human thought or understanding. Jesus’ resurrection compels us to step outside our usual human understandings of reality and enter into the divine reality.

That new reality begins with touching and seeing, flesh and bones, hands and feet, and broiled fish. Jesus said to his disciples, “Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” Then “he showed them his hands and his feet.” After this he ate a piece of broiled fish in their presence.

Flesh and bones, hands and feet, and broiled fish are the things of creation, the natural order. Mary, a woman created by God, gave Jesus his flesh and bones and his hands and feet. She also gave him the stomach that would eat the fish God created.

The resurrected life of Christ, it seems, is revealed in and through the created order. It is not, however, bound by the created order. Rather, the resurrected body and life of Christ unite the visible and invisible, matter and spirit, humanity and divinity. On the one hand Jesus has a real body. On the other hand it is not subject to the natural laws of time and space. It's not one or the other. It's both. It is a new and different reality.

The degree to which we have allowed ourselves to be bound by the created order is the degree to which are unable to see resurrected life and holiness in this world. We bind ourselves through our fears, our sorrows and losses, our runaway thoughts and distractions, our attachments and addictions to things, people, and even beliefs. Sometimes it's our unwillingness to allow or trust God to grow and change us. In binding ourselves to the created order we lose recognition of and the ability to live in the sacred. That's the very opposite of resurrected life.

The resurrected life of Christ reveals that all creation and every one of us are filled with God's holiness. Nothing can take away the grace that is given us through resurrection: unconditional love, unconditional forgiveness, and unconditional life. That is, I think, one of the most difficult things for us to see, believe, and live into. It is, however, the reality into which we are invited, not at some future time and place but here and now.

Christ our God longs and desires to open our minds to understand the scriptures, to understand all that has been written, spoken, and revealed about him in whatever form that happens and has happened. That's what Jesus did for the disciples and it's what he does for us. That the disciples are witnesses does not mean they now have all the answers. It means they now have the life Jesus wants to give them. They are witnesses based not on what they know, but on who they are, how they live, and their relationship with the risen Christ.

Think about a time in your life when you lost track of time. I don't mean you forgot what time it was, but that you were so awake, so present, that you entered a new world. Think about a time when life seemed more real than it ever had and you touched or tasted life in

a way never before. Recall a moment when your heart opened, softened, and you knew you were somehow different. Remember that day when you sensed something new was being offered you; possibilities that you did not create for yourself. They just opened up. Reflect on that moment when you realized that you were ok and could again start to live. Those are the moments when Christ opens our minds to understand. They are moments of awe and wonder that leave us in sacred silence. They fill our eyes with tears. We weep, not from sorrow or pain, but the water of new life. They are the moments in which we say, “I never want this to end. I don’t want to leave this place.”

I don’t know how this happens. I can’t give you a set of instructions or a to-do list. That would be like giving you a set of instructions on how to fall in love. The resurrected life is not acquired it is received. It happens when we risk unbinding ourselves from the usual ways of seeing, living, and relating. This is not a rejection of the natural order. It is allowing the natural order to open to and reveal something more. That’s what happened for the disciples with Jesus’ hands and feet, with his flesh and bones, and the broiled fish. They saw and recognized something about Jesus and in so doing they saw and recognized something about themselves; holiness. It happens for us too.

In each of those moments the one who is fully alive and risen, the Christ, is calling us to see and recognize him, to join him, and to discover our new life. This is the authentic self we long to become, the self that we already are, and the self we are becoming. This is resurrected life.

God does not write letters but the Archbishop was doing what he was supposed to do: He spoke in God's name, just like His ancient followers, and bore witness and gave testimony that shocked and shook the world back in its place! The Apostles were terrified and startled beyond their imaginations. Alex was shocked beyond his wildest dreams. Love is shocking and terrifying, but in its very essence, love is surprising! The greatest mystery in the world is why in the world did the Lord choose men and women to help him? We already know the answer: ***Because we can love!***

Let's not lose this moment. Let's not put this text behind us. Rather, let's carry this with us over the next week. Let it open our eyes, our hearts, and our minds to the life Christ is offering us. Let it be the voice of Christ opening our minds to understand. Sit with it. Pray with it. Wrestle with it. Trust it.

The world is a different world today because He changed us. "You are witnesses of these things," he says to us. Tell it. Live it. Become it. The resurrected life is ours. **We are witnesses!**

Resources:

Sermon Central Resources for Preaching and Teaching

The Text This Week: Scripture Study, Worship Links, and Resources

Father Cedric Pisegna Ministries- Houston Texas - www.frcedric.org

NRSV Study Bible