

PAX, PEACE, SHALOM
2nd Sunday In Easter

We are now faced with moving forward, in faith, with the challenges the Risen Christ presents to those who believe in what his life, death and resurrection truly means for all! This includes risks or it will bring about change on many fronts of our lives.

Among the claims we confront, along with those who were present when he was arrested, tried and crucified— is that Jesus has become the Risen Christ and was still with them and therefore still with us today. In fact, John writes in his gospel, many years later, as we heard: *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples...(1)* Therefore his risen presence was not limited to just those called the apostles.

Marcus Borg writes in his book, *Jesus, a New Vision*, a contemporary assessment that supports this assertion today and resonates with me: *Jesus' followers continued to experience him as a living reality, and in a new way, namely having the qualities of God. Now he could be known anywhere, and not just in a particular place, now he was the presence which abided with them. "Immanuel" which means God with us. (2)*

This appearance that John tries to describe, which may be for all his efforts indescribable, is not a resuscitated Jesus like Lazarus, but a resurrected Christ. In other words, Jesus came to his followers in that upper room, on the road, at the breaking of bread, by the sea, and down through the ages, in a sometimes recognizable way and sometimes only as a voice, a vision, an unseen presence. But this presence is always one that ultimately brings us closer to knowing that we are cared about, affirmed, supported with a sense peace, even if at first it throws us off our horse as with Saul/Paul.

The blinding flash of the obvious is, of course, the keyword LOVE. The nature of the love that Jesus gave as he taught, walked, healed and prayed was his message from a personal experience of knowing the loving Creator/God. So, when he says, *Peace be with you* that is repeated twice in today's gospel, is not the PAX of Roma, which was that of a victorious oppressor-conqueror's peace, nor the peace we bandy about today through our temporary or broken treaties but the Peace best known as *Shalom*.

Shalom has been described as that inward sense of completeness, a wholeness and is not a passing agreement but permanent. Perhaps for some, this is experienced as a sense of oneness or at-one-ment, being beloved and truly accepted which is something that no one can take away once we have accepted it. This sense of truly belonging will move out beyond oneself to experiencing all others in this light of love as Thomas Merton describes it. (3) *Something akin to loving the world because you are IN love seems to be at work here.*

When we know Shalom, something spreads out from us to others. When we know forgiveness and security from the “inside” or our inner self, that light or insight comes from love.

How do we come to know this risen Christ? I am sure there are many ways—even Saul/Paul was confronted unexpectedly on the road to Damascus. There are many ways we have to come to know this Risen Christ which most of us have explored. Two, in particular, come to me to reflect on for today.

One way we know can be found through prayer, meditation, contemplation! (4) This way is confirmed as we read of the many times Jesus moved out and away from “others” to be with the Divine in solitude in order to keep himself open and communing with God.

This process is not special, nor is it only for a select few! There are many paths that people find to connect with God. (5) For some, it is a special place and for others a path in the woods, or by sea but being with the beauty of all life. In all those cases we must always let go of the self to connect with something beyond or deeply within that has been waiting for us.

The second approach to coming to know Jesus the Risen Christ came when I was working on a speech in my senior year of high school. My Speech class had to participate in a contest, taking our theme from the life of Albert Schweitzer, who had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace (the year was 1956 in case you are wondering). I discovered his book in preparation titled, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. The closing lines from this text have been emblazoned on my heart for they spoke to me then, and today, saying that we too will know from our own experience, who Jesus is by what we do **with** and **for** others. (6) Schweitzer lived a life of giving himself and his gifts to help others as a medical missionary in Africa.

He came to know who this Jesus really was as he answered the call to serve others first hand.

So, we may consider both prayer and serving others as ways leading us to coming closer to knowing and experiencing all the Risen Christ-Immanuel, continues to ask of those who seek to follow his way of being in the world.

The challenge before us, if we are moved to accept Jesus Christ's call, is to stand in what the Quaker Parker Palmer refers to in his book, **Hidden Wholeness: Journey Toward an Undivided Life**, as the "tragic gap"(7) but I have renamed it the "creative tension." It is to hold on to the **reality of what is today, on the one hand, and the possibility of what the God of Compassion and Love—Jesus Christ, offers all life.**

Sometimes it feels too painful to see around us the broken lives of people and all life forms because of the broken promises of our hoped-for freedoms for all and our lack of stewardship for our planet. It would be easy to succumb and turn a blind eye at the seemingly overwhelming challenges. But it is necessary for us, as it was for Jesus, to name and know what the reality truly is and not get caught up in the games and fancy signs that grab our attention. (Jesus faced, the brutality of Roman occupation and injustice plus the false religious leadership of the Temple authorities) It is hard but critical to keep the hope and faith by holding firmly to what is possible for life to become: to seek justice through peace with compassion for all.

We can become disappointed and "drop out" if changes don't quickly come when we want them to. But, we need to keep holding also to the other side, which reminds us of the **reality** of what still is! We will need the patience to persevere, however, we follow the one who promises to be with us all the way and guiding us on our way.

Verna Dozier provided a mantra or litmus test for me many years ago. In her book, *The Dream of God*, she calls us out, those of us who claim to be followers of the Risen Christ saying *that we are called to stand by people in their pool of tears and question the systems that make them cry!* (8)

Let us continue work together to stop those tears and those icebergs from melting and truly work to make the **new reality**, *Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.*

Shalom..let it be so. *Alleluia, Alleluia*
Rev. Dr. Linda A. St.Clair
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References

1. *Gospel of John 19:30*
2. *Marcus Borge, Jesus a New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship*(San Francisco, Harper, 1991), p. 185
3. *Thomas Merton, A Merton Reader, ed Thomas. P. McDonnell* (New York: Image Books, 1989), p. 347.
4. *Cynthia Bourgeault, Mystical Hope: Trust in the Mercy of God*(Cambridge, Boston: Cowley Publications 2001).
5. *Ellen Clark-Kind, The Path to your Door: Approaches to Christian Spirituality*(Continuum, New York, 2011).
6. *Albert Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus*
He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside.

He came to those who knew him not. He speaks to us the same words: "Follow thou me!" And sets us to the tasks which he has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to those who obey him, whether they be wise or simple he will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in his fellowship and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.

7. *Parker Palmer, A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2004)pp174-177. See also *the Interview between Bill Moyers and Parker Palmer on U-Tube, 2011.*
8. *Verna J. Dozier, the Dream of God* (Cambridge, Boston: Cowley Publication, 1991) and *Summer Worship 1992 at EDS, Cambridge, MA.*