

E-Series

The Season of Easter

I wanted to share this reflection with you from my friend and mentor, Bishop Will Willimon. Also, I will be taking a break from the e-series for the rest of the week. We'll crank back up next week.

Happy Easter!

Pastor Michael

The God Who Refused to be Done with Us

God promised to come, in spite of our sad human history. God vowed to be with us, to show us God's glory, power, and love. That all sounded good until God Almighty dramatically made good on the promise and actually showed up as Jesus of Nazareth, not the vague and thoroughly adorable God whom we expected. Even among Jesus' closest followers, his twelve disciples, there was this strange attraction to him combined with an odd revulsion from him. "Blessed is the one who takes no offense in me," he said. But the things Jesus said and did led many to despise him. On a dark Friday afternoon in Jerusalem that revulsion became bloody repulsion as we nailed Jesus' hands and feet to a cross and hoisted him up naked over a garbage dump outside of town. At last we had done something decisive about Jesus and the God he presented, or so we thought.

Three times Jesus had hinted that his death might not be the end of the drama, yet the thought that anything in the world might be stronger than death was inconceivable to everyone around Jesus, even as it is inconceivable today. (First Century Near Eastern people did not know many things that we know, but everybody knew that what's dead stays dead.) All of his disciples were quickly resigned to his death. End of story. It was a good campaign while it lasted, but Jesus had not been enthroned as the national Messiah, the Savior of Israel. Caesar had won. Rather than cry, "Crown him!" the crowd had screamed, "Crucify him!" and stood by gleefully as the Romans executed Jesus on a cross. Mocking him, the soldiers made a crown of thorns and shoved it on his head, tacking above the cross a snide sign, "KING OF THE JEWS." Some king, reigning from a cross. In about three hours, Jesus died of either suffocation or loss of blood, depending on whom you talk to.

As is so often the case with a true and living God, our sin was not the end of the story. Three days after Jesus had been brutally tortured to death by the government -- egged on by a consortium of religious leaders like me, deserted by his disciples and then entombed -- a couple of his followers (women) went out in the early morning darkness to the cemetery. The women went forth, despite the risk in the predawn darkness, to pay their last respects to the one who had publicly suffered the most ignominious of deaths. ("Where were the men who followed Jesus?" you ask. Let's just say for now that Jesus was never noted for the quality or courage of his male disciples.)

At the cemetery, place of rest and peace for the dead, the earth quaked. The huge stone placed by the soldiers before the entrance (why on earth would the army need a big rock in front of a tomb to keep in the dead?) was rolled away. An angel, messenger of God, perched impudently upon the rock.

The angel preached the first Easter sermon: "Don't be afraid. You seek Jesus, who was crucified? He is risen! Come, look at where he once lay in the tomb." Then the angel commissioned the women to become Jesus' first preachers: "Go, tell the men that he has already gone back to Galilee. There you will meet him."

It was a typically Jesus sort of moment, with people thinking they were coming close to where Jesus was resting only to be told to "Go!" somewhere else. Jesus is God in motion, on the road, constantly going somewhere, often to where he is not invited. Jesus was warned by his disciples not to go to Jerusalem but Jesus, ever the bold traveler, did not let danger deter him, with predictable results -- his death on a cross. And now, on the first Easter morning, death cannot daunt his mission. Jesus is once again on the

move. So the angel says to the women, "You're looking for Jesus? Sorry, just missed him. By this time in the day, he's already in Galilee. If you are going to be with Jesus, you had better get moving!"

It's that the week after Easter, time after resurrection. Let's get moving.

William H. Willimon

Note: Just this week I got some empirical proof of the resurrection. A couple of years ago we sent sent young Wade Griffith to our venerable Trinity Church in Tuscaloosa. Trinity has suffered rather steady decline in the past decades. Trinity has not paid its fair share of mission and benevolence apportionments for at least two decades, maybe even longer. This year Trinity will pay 100%! They are currently hiring a new Children's Minister, because they are being besieged by children. Tell me that Jesus did not rise from the dead and return to us!!!