

## From Here to There

A few years ago, I attended a preachers conference on the mainland.

That seminar is an annual event that draws nearly 2000 clergy from all over the world, and it's always scheduled a few weeks after Easter.

"We schedule it then," the organizer explained, "because that's when a lot of ministers fall into a funk: some get depressed, even the suicide rate goes up!"

It seems that the fine feelings of Easter come crashing down mighty quickly on some of my brother and sister ministers.

Which, when you think about it, is kind of sad.

Here we are in the middle of the 50 days of Easter, that time from Easter Sunday until the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, 50 days later.

At least during these 50 days you'd think we'd keep the unexplainable miracle of Easter alive!

Especially here at ST. E's.

More than most places, we know something about Easter because we know something about death, and resurrection.

We know something about Easter because we know that only 10 short years ago, there was a real chance that the doors of St. E's might be closed forever.

Only 10 short years ago, there were maybe 30 people sitting in these pews for the 9 o'clock mass, so unlike the nearly 200 who are now coming to worship week in and week out.

The parking lot was mostly dirt and weeds, back before dear Lowell Ing gave us a new lot in memory of Pat, before our many Tongan friends spent days resealing and restriping it.

Who knew that Shim hall, which was rarely opened, the kitchen almost never used, and the grassy lawn that maybe once a year hosted an Easter Egg hunt by a hand full of children would be transformed into a hall that's used constantly, a kitchen that's always cooking, a lawn that is now a rich garden full of fresh greens, and a Sunday school with over 50 children, from toddlers to high schoolers?

Who knew?

Some of you sitting right here in these pews, you knew.

10 years ago, you who were here, long before me, long before many of us, you had a dream, you had a vision.

You wrote it down.

You spelled it out.

It was a look into the future, since the present showed only glimmers of what you dreamed.

You set out a plan to try to get from "here" to "there."

Getting from here to there is exactly where Jesus and the disciples are today.

The gospel scene is the day before Jesus is arrested.

Jesus tells them he is going away.

"How do we get to where you are going?" ask the disciples.

"How do we get to where you want us to be, to who you want us to become?" asks every church that struggles to do God's will.

We ask it today.

What Jesus tells them, tells us, is that this journey is not one of miles, it is one of the heart.

And because it is a journey of the heart, "there" is already "here" just waiting for us to realize it....

One of the things I learned at that preaching seminar was that before the year 1750, the most common symbol in art for God's relationship with us is the picture of the baby Jesus sucking at Mary's breast.

I like that image.

My wife, being Tahitian, has a ton of paintings up at our home with bare breasted women; it's as natural as can be for that culture.

Unlike Tahiti, however, in most of the world since 1750, breasts, when they are not securely covered, are too often on display not as sacred art, but as pornography; symbolizing not so much salvation, but sex.

After 1750, what replaced the suckling child as the symbol of our relationship with God is another portrait of Mary, but this time, it is Mary standing at the foot of the cross.

The symbol of God's great love for us, feeding at the breast, was replaced with the symbol of sacrifice.

In John's gospel, Jesus says that no one has ever seen God, but only Jesus, who is at the very BOSOM of God.

At the last supper, the Beloved Disciple is seated next to Jesus.

You've all seen this depicted in Da Vinci's painting of the last supper.

The Beloved Disciple rests his head on the bosom of Jesus.

And who, you may be wondering, who is the beloved disciple?

As we seek to journey from here to there, please remember this one unchanging truth, this one piece of ultimate reality, that it is you, **you** are the beloved disciple: you are the beloved disciple of Jesus; and your place is to snuggle right there into the very bosom of God.

In all of our wants and in all of our needs, we are each of us infants at the breast, and God is the joyful mother, eager to feed us well.

And so it is that you who dreamed dreams for this place, 10 years ago, said:

Open the doors!

Unlock the gates!

Welcome the old timers back!

Welcome the new comers!

Class or color, aged or young, monied or not, immigrant or native, you said: Come!

Having peered into the abyss as a dying community of God, you said, we are laying a new stone at St. Elizabeth's: it is the Living Stone of Jesus Christ.

And as the Lord welcomes all, so we too welcome all.

Peter's letter today talks about stones.

The Living Stone, stones as cornerstones, stones as stumbling blocks.

That's the funny thing about stones you know, you can build on them, and you can trip over them, you can kill with them, and according to John the Baptist, God can even raise up children of Abraham from them!

And as we here have come back from death to life, with the hard work and prayers and participation of so many, sometimes the same rock that is a cornerstone can also become a stumbling block.

"Maybe we should lock some of the doors again."

"Maybe we aren't attracting the 'right kind' of people."

"Maybe we're using our buildings, our grounds, our staff too much."

The brand new church, 2000 years ago, faced the same questions we face today.

Who's in?

Who's out?

There were plenty of newcomers then too.

Some with mighty strange habits.

Some who were lazy.

Some not so bright.

Some just completely different.

Some who had a lot, and some who wouldn't share, and some who didn't care to mingle with "that kind" of folk.

The first lesson today tells the same story, only here it is the Jewish people deciding who's in and who's out.

If you follow Jesus, you're out baby!

Stephen, the first martyr, dies as proof of that.

In the second lesson, we hear from Peter, who was flummoxed for the longest time about whether hot dog eaters are allowed in, or smelly people, or if uppity Greeks, with all of their manhood still intact, were membership worthy.

Peter finally gets the message because he discovers that out of the resurrection of Jesus, a new family is being born.

It's not Haole or Chinese or Polynesian or Micronesian.

It's not brown or white or black.

It's Haole and Chinese and Polynesian and so much more.

It grows not out of the blood of families, but out of the blood of Christ.

It's who we are today, 10 years after our near death experience.

Look around.

Look around at Chinese yes, Haole yes, and yes, Filipino and Hawaiian and Japanese and Chuukese and Tongan and African American and more.

Peter finally gets it and he says to you, he says to me: "God is the host, and we are all of us honored guests."

We are here today not because the resurrection is some unexplained miracle that happened in the distant past, we are here because Paul, who the murderers of Steven took marching orders from, got knocked to the ground and into the service of the Kingdom of God; we are here because Peter is time and again rescued from prisons and chains so he can continue to spread the good news that death is defeated; we are here because the saints and martyrs of every generation open their doors, open their hearts, and open their wallets to people of every place,

every class, every color, every creed, and invite them to build on the cornerstone that is Jesus Christ.

We are here because a white deaconess with rich white money extended a hand to Chinese immigrants over 100 years ago, immigrants who were despised and persecuted and rejected by the white population.

We are here because 10 years ago, you who remained had a dream, and you wrote it down, and your vision is coming to pass..... just take a look around.

We are here because the Holy Spirit is not yet finished with us.

And while we came frighteningly close to the abyss 10 short years ago, the resounding voice of Peter echoes through the ages:

"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once, you were not a people, but now, you are God's own people.

Once, you had not received mercy, but now, now, you have received mercy."

Easter never ends.

The resurrection is an unexplainable miracle that happens right here, today, in our very midst.

Maybe that's what my brother and sister ministers needed reminding of at that mainland conference.

Maybe that's what we need reminding of too from time to time.

And if we snuggle up to the very bosom of God, perhaps we will find, on our journey from here to there, that we have already arrived.

As St. Catherine of Sienna comes to discover: "All the way to heaven is heaven, for Jesus says, 'I am the way!'"

+amen