

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

There are fifty-two Sundays, fifty-two opportunities to consider and preach the gospel. But in my mind, considering the state of the world and the current state of the church, there is NO greater message than the one coming out of the readings for today. Not Christmas. Not even Easter Day. Those two messages are the core, for sure. But for those of us who attend church fairly regularly, I think the readings for today are IT.

That does not seem right. After all, Christmas is the celebration of God actually coming to be with us...empowering, enabling us to enter into a personal relationship with God. This is not the God of idols, not the God of remoteness, not the God of "out there" or "hands off"...but rather this is the God here for you and me. And as for Easter, we hear the message that this Son of God, the man who was killed, came back...was raised from the dead. What could be bigger than that?

Our 21st century world has questions of belief, largely based upon modern science and relatively universal education. We also have a greater Christian church full of foggy, indecisive, or insecure faith influenced, in large part I believe, by the very same forces at work in the world that focus all power and knowledge and influence upon mankind's abilities apart from God.

There are documented incidents of a few bishops who do not really believe, so why should you or I be any different? Much of the greater church has a disconnect without passion...it is like hearing stories about, say, the Civil War battle of Gettysburg...interesting history to some, but really...who cares? What does that old stuff, that old worn-out way of life and thinking have to do with me, and my life?

I can go on, but that would be redundant. It is all redundant...because none of this is new. None of it.

2,000 years after the fact, we hear the story of some man who died and was buried. Then, suddenly, just after the body starts to decompose, it is Raised, they say. Well, forget about the difference of 2000 years. Maybe our world can be forgiven its disbelief, because in Luke's story, the body was barely cold and his dearest, closest friends did not believe it either. The body was barely cold...and they all said, "No way."

I invite you to consider the literary style of Luke's gospel. Consider the straight-forward narrative. Luke's story is matter-of-fact, no nonsense, the straight-out story of Jesus. This Jesus had a lifetime passion of singular purpose. Luke tells of the Jesus who saw his mission in life early, and never strayed or deviated from that path...even to the end. But, at the end...the story does not end. In Luke's tell-it-like-it-was style, we hear more of it today. And Luke pulls no punches...exactly the kind of in-your-face storytelling that we need in this

day and age as much as he needed to tell it then.

This was not resuscitation, but instead is a resurrection. In resuscitation, biological life is restored but the individual remains mortal and must experience biological death again. Resurrection, on the other hand, is not a restoration of biological life, but rather a transformation from mortality to immortality.

Do we understand this? The difference in definition is easy enough as a mental exercise, but the rest? Luke tells us...here are the facts, here is the truth. Here is Jesus, after death. And Luke makes the point as strongly as he can: Jesus not only came back, but he came back as a guy with a body. Once a dead man, but a dead man no longer. Not a ghost from the haunts of the dead, but back as a guy with a body. Count the scars. Touch him, because once you are resurrected, being treated as a ghost is something of an insult. He is as real as they are. As real as you are. Luke says he is as real as you are sitting in that pew. Luke makes the point that Jesus is hungry for food, asking "Have you anything here to eat?" Why add that to the story? Because ghosts do not get hungry. Takes broiled fish...detail Luke thinks we need...and eats it. This once dead man eats it.

Who cares if you were there to see it or not? It happened, says Luke, and that is it. No fluff. No chaff. No embellishment. Jesus of Nazareth blew onto the scene. He did this and that, with power and presence, with grace and love. And the story builds up and up, following the great prophesies of the ages to be crucified to death and be buried. And now? He is eating fish.

So...now, here is the urgency...the point for us. Luke's gospel...and the entire New Testament...was first told, and later written, decades and even centuries after the actual events being told. During the actual events themselves, these disciples were seemingly clueless. Fishermen and others by trade. Not theologians. They did not have the eye of the tiger, did not see the mission. Did not get it. For days after the cross, they hide in fear of their lives. Unsure. Lost. Lacking direction. With no future. Kind of like the greater church of today.

And then...wham! Luke says...it is real. Jesus comes back with a body. All bodies are important to God...even bodies that were dead...whether you define death as physical, or spiritual, or both. He threatens his disciples with life. Makes them REALLY understand scripture.

What do they come to understand, through the revelation by the Holy Spirit? Jesus says to them, "Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in the name of the Messiah to all nations." What is that really? How does God, through Jesus as the Christ, threatens us with life...instead of the death that we know? We hear the prayer at the absolution, found on page 360 of our prayer book.

It is the power of God, through Jesus as the Christ, to help us change from who we are into who God longs for us to be. People of righteousness with God, coming out of becoming people changed into walking,

talking carriers of forgiveness...of ourselves and of each other...all coming from God, and in the Name of God.

Sin, as a single word, is the noun that defines all and everything we are and do contrary to our relationship with God, and therefore also contrary to our relationship with ourselves and each other. When we lay down the terrible responsibility of trying or appearing to be right, or perfect...all as players in a world that demands comparisons and hierarchy and status based on personal ego and desire...then we begin to move down a different path in life that the world does not recognize. Because the world did not, and does not, know him.

Coming to know him, in the developing journey of a lifetime relationship caused by being actually transformed by the Spirit, in the realization of "eternal life". Life that sees the humanity of all persons, the humility of enjoying what is offered to us, the joy of anticipating what is ahead.

These disciples now had all of that revealed to them, and they were overwhelmed.

So now, in the very face of Roman soldiers and Jewish authorities looking to crucify anyone in sight, they go wild. Cannot contain themselves. Nothing can hold them back. Nothing can stop them.

Peter gets it. He is a witness to Jesus being alive again, so Peter knows there is power to heal that disabled man who begs at the gate of the Temple. There are no coins to put in his cup, but by the power of Jesus, the Resurrected One, Peter pulls him up, and the beggar goes off dancing. The authorities are not amused, so Peter gets hauled off to court, and there he talks about this Jesus back from the dead with a body. Straight-talking Peter...all because the first one has come back alive from the whipping, the cross, and the grave.

God makes bodies, resurrects them, and sustains them. For God, they are entirely holy, whether the body of Jesus, or yours, or mine...and it looks as though God does not tell the difference. When do we get that, in our hearts? And because there are bodies all over: natural, spiritual, sacramental....Jesus shows up, complete with body, there in the Upper Room, here on our altar, and in each of us as his Church. Jesus shows up...he tells us himself...not as a ghost, but as a body, somehow in the sick, the poor, the hungry. He still asks us that question: "Have you anything here to eat?" He shows up, not as a ghost, but in the bodies of all around us. The world, and we, may threaten him with death, but he threatens us with life. Threatens us with life.

That is what this back-to-life Jesus wants of us. Not just spectators, but witnesses. Not airy spirits or pious ghosts, but bodies like his own with wounds to show, bodies that witness to resurrection, threatening the world with life...because the only Easter some people may ever see is the Easter they see in us as the witnesses of the living God.

In the name of the One who makes all bodies, redeems them, and sanctifies them, as the Father, and as the Son, and as the Holy Spirit. Amen.