

11th April 2004 Easter Sunday: Rev Pressley Sutherland

Theme: ?Don?t Even Try and Keep Me Down!?
Reading: Mark 15.1-8

Jesus Comes Out as the Messiah

Sometimes we have the idea that Jesus of Nazareth was simply a puppet in the passion story?one with little choice but to accept the violence that was to occur. I believe that to have such a view is to rob Christ of his vitality and strength of purpose.

Jesus taught us that ?whatever we bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever we loose (set free) on earth will be loosed in heaven.? In this teaching he was showing us that God listens to those who are faithful and know God?s heart for God?s children. I believe that the resurrection was a powerful sign that God listened to her/his beloved child on behalf of those for whom he loved, lived and died.

Jesus was rarely passive in the face of injustice, so it is unlikely that he would have been so in the Easter story. It was not so difficult for Jesus, as we see him prophesying time and again, to see into the hearts of people and know what was likely to happen to him if he kept on preaching and teaching all that the Spirit was revealing in his heart. But his words and teachings lead me to believe that his prayer was not only, ?Abba, forgive them, they don?t know what they are doing.? But also that his upcoming trials would not be for naught, but that God would transform the sin and destruction that humanity is capable of into a demonstration of such power and such faith, that those who called on his name as the new Messiah hereafter would be ?loosed? or freed from sin?s deception and false power.

This is what Jesus was saying as he taught the disciples the new meaning of the bread of sacrifice and the cup of deliverance at the last Passover meal. At the heart of this prayerful communion was the request to remember him and know that God will remember each of them as he had asked God to do. In his resurrection, Jesus is fully revealed as the Christ, the one who interceded to free those who will call on his name with love and faith. So, don?t even try to keep the love of Christ down ? God has answered the prayers of her/his Child and freedom, strength and new life are our heritage and spiritual reality.

Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson once said that Jesus? whole life was a coming out story, with the Passion and Resurrection as his culminating revelation of who he really was. If you think it has been tough to come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, straight but not narrow ? imagine living with the knowledge that you are the Child of God?must have been like being in a Messianic closet for much of his life!

The Year to Come Out as a Christian and Uncover the Treasure

Perhaps this is the year to fully come out as a Christian. We have become tentative. We sometimes idealize other faith traditions-allowing them to be mystical, allowing them to bring awakening and healing, allowing them to be peaceful and progressive. Perhaps we do so because we don?t want to appear like one of those kinds of Christians.

But Christ taught a parable that said that the finding the Kingdom is like finding a treasure, burying it in the field for safety, and then selling all else in your life in order to purchase that field so you may uncover it and lawfully lay claim to it.

By naming ourselves as Christians, we have found the treasure and have bought the field, but the treasure is still buried for many of us. Why are we trying to keep this treasure covered over by layers of dirt? Why do we insist on keeping the stone over the site of resurrection when every cell of our beings longs to cry out, ? Hosanna to God in the highest. Let the light of new life into my darkened tomb?.I want to get out and breath the air, see the sun, run to the people I love and tell them that what Christ said is true. It was all true?God is good, and I have been remembered just as Christ asked for me! Please, don?t even try to keep me down!...I may still look like my body is broken?.I may still be lacking in complete understanding?.but I am believing God to be my sustainer everyday. I am trusting the Holy Spirit to not only be present, but manifested in my life-with signs and wonders, acts of love and compassion, and new words and songs to sing even in a strange land sometimes.?

If we listen closely, we will hear God speaking to our hearts, often through others, to inspire us to unearth the treasure that is within, come out as Christians and let God?s Spirit be revealed through us.

Personal Witness-Hearing the Call to Come Out Completely Spiritually

God has many ways of speaking to us, inviting us to uncover the true force of resurrection power in our lives. From the time I preached my first sermon at MCC New York, people have often assumed that I come from an evangelical or charismatic background. Actually my religious background is quite different.

I grew up in a fairly structured and liturgical United Methodist Church. As a child, I wrote songs from an early age - but I could only write spiritual songs ? and they tended to rock and be full of praise! This in a church where we sang mostly classical anthems and brick-solid four-part hymns and responses. I quickly learned to keep a lid on it while at the same time growing to love those in my home church. I was once baptised in a Southern Baptist church as a teen, but that was a brief encounter.

When I went to University, I was active in an Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist fellowship. The ELM Centre was full of faith, but a far cry from evangelical or charismatic student groups. Later, I attended a Catholic Folk Mass for several years before becoming a musician in an Episcopal jazz Mass in New York.

Eventually I went on the road touring with a production of ?Jesus Christ Superstar? where I met my husband, David, and came out as gay to the few remaining people I hadn?t come out to before. I went to Seminary, found MCC New York, began preaching in many places, ended up in London, and invariably, all along the way, people have assumed that I grew up charismatic and evangelical. But I am finally getting it - what God has been saying to me through many people all along - that there is indeed the Spirit-given passion of an evangelist within me when it comes to sharing about Jesus the Nazarene. Perhaps you, like me, learned long ago to cover this treasure under layers of misunderstanding - but it is a spiritual passion that cannot be denied forever and needs to be resurrected.

In Each of Us Is The Answer to Jesus? Prayer for Forgiveness and Resurrection Power

I found that when I came out completely as gay years ago, just as I could no longer hide my passion and love for my husband, I could no longer hide the passion and love in other areas of my life - particularly when it came to my faith in the way of Christ. Just as coming out sexually/emotionally/relationally compelled me to fight for the right to manifest equality for all people, so coming out continues to compel me to fight for the right to manifest Holy Spirit not only in l/g/b/t lives, but in all who call on Christ?s name.

You see, when someone gets the gospel message that truth, love, Christ, God and our Spirits are meant to be abiding in oneness through faith ? then don?t even try to keep them down. You can?t do it, because they are full of resurrection power ? and they are full of forgiveness ? forgiving with Christ others for misunderstanding and being afraid ? forgiving ourselves for misunderstanding and being afraid. Perhaps forgiving ourselves for knowing that we have kept the call of the Kingdom buried deep down ? the call to heal, hold, teach, share Christ, sing to God, visit the sick, do acts of service - all to manifest the Holy Spirit. Forgive yourself because it is understandable to misunderstand and be afraid.

In today?s reading, Mary Magdalene and the other women did not run away from the empty tomb rejoicing, they went away terrified at first. Not only had they experienced something supernatural in seeing an angel, but they were the very first people to try to comprehend the possibility that God had resurrected the dead! They knew the other disciples would think they had been wishfully deceived at best or were liars at worst. But they eventually took the risk and made manifest the truth of resurrection first in their faithful witness ? all before they had seen physical evidence or fully understood what this meant.

So this Easter, forgive yourself for not knowing everything. And forgive others for misunderstanding you and Christ?s love for you as you are?forgive that Teacher, Church, politician, friend, or family member for not understanding the buried treasure of God?s Kingdom and Spiritual gifts within you. Roll that big ol? stone away, and come out spiritually with Christ. Believe that Jesus had you in mind when he asked God to manifest forgiveness and resurrection power in the lives of all who call on his name. Christ has risen indeed! It is true?.it is all true!