

Sermon: 2020/04/26 (Third Sunday of Easter, Year A) - Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 116:1-3,10-17; 1 Peter 1:17-23; &, Luke 24:13-36_BTR

Part of me is always bemused - "bemused" and *baffled* - whenever I read about the "Road to Emmaus" incident that the two disciples - "disciples" from the wider, anonymous circle of followers - took sooo(!) long to "recognize" their rabbi, Jesus: [24:13].

Although we're not supplied with *exact* timings, they certainly enjoyed His resurrected company for some *hours* - not mere minutes:

They were with Him most of a 'day' [v.13], you see, and until 'evening': [v.29].

What was, then, their "major malfunction"?

How did they not see who it was with them until He re-enacted the first Eucharist, and broke the bread?

After all, even if the process of coming back from the dead; from "Hades" [Acts 2:31] *changed* Jesus' appearance in some strange, subtle fashion; the New Testament is *clear* that He still had the gaping wounds of crucifixion on His body: just think back to last week's gospel passage, and how Saint Thomas was invited to place - and I quote - "'your *hand*...in my side.'" [Jn. 20:27]

That's a *big* hole, then!

Very visible.

(Albeit under a robe, no doubt.)

So, how did they not notice such *conspicuous* evidence as to the "stranger's" identity?

Those gory nail-channels in particular, which were left in His hands and in His feet?

One might say; one might *preach* that something supernatural prevented them from apprehending the obvious; that some mystic power was deliberately imposed from "above" for some reason - like a charm spell cast by Harry Potter.

But that suggestion is predicated on a certain conception of God, which is that He is a "game-player."

A Loki-like trickster;

a conniving magician who likes to manipulate and embarrass His audience by misdirection and sleights of hand.

To which I ask: "*Why?! What purpose does it serve God to delay their epiphany?!*"

An "epiphany" that the world was desperate to hear.

For it was on the very cusp - a cliff-hanger - waiting to be forever turned "upside-down" by the *amazing* testimony of the disciples about Christ and the empty tomb, and it must have been exasperating for Him to now have to "chase around" and re-recruit the Twelve and their friends, and get them "back on task."

Fortunately for us, He is patient and gracious.

Which is why we find Him in this morning's text, '*miles*', says Luke, 'from Jerusalem' (and where He was buried) [Lk. 24:13], taking the time to, *methodically*, convince this pair of wayward Christians to return to Peter and the others and "get with the program."

How frustrating we are to God!

"Oh, how foolish..." (Verse twenty-five.)

A quotation which brings me to what I think is the *true* answer, perhaps; which is that they were 'kept from recognising Him' [v.16] by their (own) lack of belief. Firstly, most apparently, by a "lack of belief" in the predictions that Jesus Himself had repeatedly made to them about His Easter triumph: [see Mk. 8:31, 14:58; Lk. 9:22, Jn. 2:19].

Secondly, by a "lack of belief" in the corroborating account offered by the women who went to embalm Jesus but found Him absent: [Lk. 24:22].

But, *specifically*, the problem; the *obstacle*; the source of their disbelief was their presuppositions;

their "presuppositions" about what is possible in this world and what is fantastical. In other words, their view about what is *real*.

And we probably suffer from the same, potentially limited "sight."

This (here [gesture to the room; tap the wall]) is what is "real;"

this is what can be trusted and relied upon.

And *this* [gesture to the Bible] is...well...something else.

In the estimation of many, that is.

"Many" - and myself on occasion, particularly in the past - can't be sure that "The Real" extends to what I find in here.

I - and perhaps you - can't be sure that "The Real" embraces such things as massive rolled away stones and miraculous men rising from their graves.

And *I*, perhaps, can't be sure that "The Real" has room in it; is generous enough to accommodate the corresponding ideas - the corresponding theology; *the hope* of eternal-second-life and forgiveness-for-all.

My idea of "The Real;" my *experience* of the real, at least, doesn't - *hasn't* - certainly I speak for myself - included such incredible things as sightings of angels as described in today's gospel reading.

Extrapolating from that, therefore, I've, historically, struggled to imagine that anyone anywhere has ever had such an unusual encounter.

Consequently, my expectation; my imagination of "The Real" is smaller; more modest than that volunteered by the Holy Scriptures.

So I scoff; I smirk and am sceptical when something begins to "push" on the limits of what I believe is real.

The reaction I feel is almost mechanistic; instinctive.

But could it be that my conception of "The Real" is unjustifiably shrunken;

diminished; truncated?

Which is why Jesus' sudden appearance among the disciples at the end of the episode described - not by the door, but through the wall doesn't "compute."

Real people can't move *through* solid objects.

Or so I'm accustomed to think.

Yet is that always true?

Let me challenge you, by repeating to you the words of a recent tweet sent by Peter Tepper, Cathedral Missioner in the Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida:

He writes -

'Jesus doesn't walk through doors and walls because He is less real.

He walks through walls and doors because He is *more* real.

Just as a solid hand cuts through vapour, the maker walks through what He has made as though it is just a little bit of mist.' [n.1] [Pause.]

In other words, just as a sharp knife slices effortlessly butter, which not only melts into a liquid in a warm room but can be evaporated (altogether) in a hot pan, and so we might say that the knife has more "reality"; a reality that is more stubborn, more undeniable; a hard, metallic reality that is to be more reckoned with than a block of soft, yellow squidgy hydrocarbons - so God, in fact, similarly, despite His invisibility to our eyes, is so *real* that it overwhelms and divides and *slices through* our transitory, ephemeral, finite universe.

Ironically, then, Jesus' unusual, *surprising* method of room-entry demonstrates what is in fact *most* real of all: *God*.

God and His love.

This is the source from which everything we understand and know to be real is such;

which, *ipso facto*, it turns out, is at most a mere reflection; a passing portrayal, then, of the Divine mind.

That is to say: our universe and our part in it is "real" only the way a painting is real vis-vis the painter.

[Pointing upward] *He* is the artist.

This is why we find Saint Paul saying to the Corinthians:

'For now we see in a mirror, dimly,

but then we will see face to face.

Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.' [13:12]

Once we grasp that *this* is the truth, our fierce grip is loosened on those things we *tend* to treasure.

Those 'perishable' "things" like, as Peter observes in the epistle, 'silver or gold':

[1:18].

And, dare I say it, *health*...

This truth, if we let it, will "purify" '[our] souls': [v.22].

Seeing that He - the Creator - exceeds and is much greater than our - currently - frightened, threatening view of "The Real," which right now plagues us, will bring you a peace that can't be found by other means.

'[I]t reminds us that Christian faith gives us a different perspective.'^[n.2]

So, let's just sit with it awhile....

Footnotes:

1. @pete_tepper, twitter.com, 19th of April, 2020.
2. Lennox, John C. (2020), *Where Is God in a Coronavirus World?*, The Good Book Company, 53.