

SERMON      THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER    2021.04.18      ©GYLLIAN DAVIES†

In her book “Cloister Walk” Kathleen Norris tells a story shared with her by the monks she was sojourning with. First of all you need to know that Benedictine monks take hospitality very seriously! All guests are to be treated as the Christ. If someone turns up - you welcome them, feed them, worship with them and get to know them. No-one is to be turned away. So... in our story there is a guest at monastery who has been very high maintenance! His mattress was pronounced lumpy, the food didn't have enough salt, the people doing the readings were too fast or too slow or didn't speak loud enough. It was just one complaint after another. But after a while he left and went on his way. None too soon, right! The monks heaved a sigh of relief. But then, one day, one of the monks looked out the window and who did he see coming up the steps but the same man. And he groaned, “Oh Jesus. Here you come again!”

We might have a similar reaction to this morning's reading - Were you thinking, WAIT. Didn't we just have this same story last Sunday? Why are we having it again?!? Well, that's a good question!

What do you think - is it because it was so amazing and wonderful we just want to keep telling it to each other, sharing all the different versions of how Jesus came back to be with the disciples, came back to be with us. You know how it is - when something really amazing and wonderful and life-transforming happens... we can't stop talking about it!

Or maybe, we're having this story again because it's so complicated and beyond our twenty-first century reality - Jesus rising from the dead. Walking through walls. Eating a meal of fish with his dear friends. If that happened now, if it turned out a dear friend who died was actually the Child of God, and he or she died, and then came back - what would we think? And would we even dare tell others? Would they think we'd lost it, gone crazy?! Because we're programmed to only believe what can be scientifically tested - and this is uncomfortably and most definitely NOT VERIFIABLE by scientific means.

Or possibly this repeating of the story might be to get our attention. Cause there's just too many dang things demanding our attention all the time. And maybe with all these things that fill up our lives your attention wandered last week and you never really heard the reading cause there was this other conundrum in your life you needed to chew over!

Over this past week I was mulling and pondering on the readings for today. On the one hand Christ's Resurrection is the most amazing, wonderful, fabulous, incredible reality we will ever encounter!!! But there's a hook in there - cause , on the other hand, for us, it may indeed be incredible. Actually we might be secretly thinking - that's really not believable... And then I began to wonder - how many of us are still

trying to operate on the faith we were taught as children? How many of us, for example, have never questioned exactly what the Creed means.

Maybe some of us handle it like this:

When I first came back to the church it happened like this: church-shopping with Tina. Let's go to the cathedral cause they have evensong and a beautiful choir. And we got there and the choir was beautiful. But even more wonderful - there was a woman priest! And the words of the liturgy were so familiar and beautiful. I felt like I'd come home and I wept.

Afterwards I phoned an old friend, the priest who had been in charge of the regional Anglican youth group when I was a teenager and I told him how amazing it was. And he wept with me and read me a poem. But then I said "I don't know if I'll stay because I'm really uncomfortable with the creed." And he said "Oh, we all cross our fingers when we say the creed. Don't let that come between you and God and coming back to church."

But it was my discomfort with the creed that led me to discover something interesting. Over the months after I returned to the church of my childhood - this one, right?! - I was hanging around people who were question-askers and 'God-botherer's' and I began to realize that I was still functioning in some areas with the faith of my childhood. I mean - my understanding and comprehension of what all this meant was still at a 16 year old level. Some of it even younger, maybe a 13 year old level from my confirmation classes. Cause who ever talks about what things mean! Who ever asks the big questions - did Jesus really walk through the walls? Did the power of God, moving through Peter and Paul really heal a man who'd been crippled all his life? How do I make sense of *that* in my own life? Does it mean that if my faith were deep enough and strong enough that I could heal people from cancer? And what about that Creed!

What I realized is that using my childhood understanding of God and Jesus, of the Trinity and even of faith-healing - it wasn't big enough for who I was as an adult. It wasn't sophisticated enough. It wasn't real enough to feed my spiritual hunger and curiosity. So what do *you* think? What does being a Christian mean to you? Baptized, Sunday School, confirmation and then just go along and we've got it all covered? WHAT?!?! Are you kidding me? Think about it - do you still see the rest of the world now the same way did when you were 13? DO you respond to it the same? Live in it the same? Have the same expectations? No? Really!

So what would ever make us think we could let our faith and our beliefs not grow up too? But do we? Do we grow our Christianity up? Become a grown-up Christian?

And maybe this doesn't apply to you. Maybe you've been working away at making sense of your faith all your adult life. But in case not - here's some suggestions on

where to start cause you might be wondering - How would you do that anyway? How would you grow your faith up? I think it means doing at least one of these things:

1. Be curious. Ask questions - of yourself. Of me, if you like. Of God. Pursue oddities, mysteries, things that don't match up or have always bothered you. Find answers that make sense to who you are now. Or at least find the beginning of the answers.
2. Confront your fears, misgivings, discomforts. Don't ignore them. It's your own wisdom telling you something isn't sitting right for you.
3. Figure out - what does my faith mean for me? Who is God to me?
4. When you have some answers, look for what that means about your actions, about how you live your life. If this is true, then that is what I need to be doing.
5. Acknowledge your hunger. Find the spiritual food that fills you. Savour it. You're not hungry? Why not? What's *that* about?

And lastly

6. Embrace change, uncertainty, mystery - that's where God lives. And that is where the juice is. That's where you'll find God at work - in the world and in you.

It's a lot right? Think of it as waking up. Stepping out of the teenage dream world/identity. Deciding to be a grown-up Christian. Thinking about signing up? The theologian, Dorothy Solle wrote that,

"Change happens at the level of action that contains risk".

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And isn't that when we know it's really worth doing ?

Amen.