

“Born Again”

The Rev. Drew Willard
UCC at The Villages, FL
March 27th, 2016
Easter Sunrise

*Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.”
Now none of the disciples dared ask him,
“Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord.*

John 21:12

Let us pray... O God,
We thank you for this day and for our gathering this morning
to remember and celebrate Jesus’ Resurrection from death.
We greet the Sun like we expect to greet you someday on that sunrise to eternity
when we will be gathered with all your people.

Amen

What are you doing here at this hour?

What are you doing here when you could have stayed home snug in bed?
You are either mystics seeking a spiritual experience or
golfers with an early t-time!

Sunrise services are a great way to celebrate Easter!

You get up early in the morning while it is still dark out.
You go someplace to watch the horizon –
though the best place is the ocean, and then you wait...
There’s that first crimson slim band of red-gold open like an eyelid of morning –
and I remember one time, watching how the Sun seemed to burn
right up through the cloud cover on the far edge of the world.
It would not be denied – like the proverbial ‘truth crushed to earth’
that pushes its way out anyway!

It appears, first, a majestic red to burnished gold –
smiling in the sky like Jesus fearless, defiant of the worldly powers, joyful...
Though you must be careful to look away now and then,
it rises higher to become a soft, benevolent white and
if you squint, the Sun turns into a cross...

At church camp in Bethany Beach, DE on a Thursday morning in August of 1971,
a group of us stood on the shore to watch the Sun come up
like Jesus rising from the tomb.

Years later in August 1984 – I made a return trip to Bethany,
driving up from Ft Gordon, GA on my way to seminary at Lancaster, PA,
just to see the Sun come up – like going to church to see Jesus.

That time, I saw dolphins playing off shore and flights of gulls,
back and forth and back again – three times for the Trinity!

Willard, p.2

I went from the beach to a breakfast café on the boardwalk,
un-showered, un-shaved, but clean from the inside out
and my smile was reflected in the waitress' smile
as I ordered my eggs and toast and coffee "communion".

That café doesn't even exist anymore, but...

the view from my table looking out through their picture window
overlooking the beach was like Salvadore Dali's surreal painting
"Sacrament of The Last Supper".

Experiences like this don't happen every day,
and they don't really prove anything to anybody – outside of yourself.

But the beauty of the natural world does lend itself
to such moments of epiphany when – for a time, we get to peek
at the mystery of God.

These insights also serve to remind us how important our environment is
though we often live our lives insulated from Creation.

Like the disciples wanting to build shrines on the Mount of Transfiguration,
we want to stay there, and linger in the ecstatic moment,
when all the worlds troubles drop away.

The disciples saw the true nature of Who Jesus is and
they wanted to stay there with him, but...

they had work to do, back down there in the valley...

Peter – or Simon Peter, as he was sometimes called, was one of those disciples.

Early on we learn that the name "Peter" means "Rock"
when Jesus said, "Upon this 'rock' I will build my church."

I like to think this nickname also meant "Rocky".

The name "Simon" means "Wisdom";

so together "Simon Peter" means "Strong Wisdom" –
or it could also mean "Smart as a Rock"...

In the Gospel stories about him, Peter was often impetuous –
ready to jump in regardless of the consequences.

He was a man of action, a working class guy,
who struggled to appreciate his feminine side and Right Brain thinking,
usually opting for saying what was on his mind
or stepping out into the unknown, when he should have thought twice.

He needed to see life in practical terms like Martha of Bethany

who got upset with her sister Mary for sitting there listening to Jesus
while she was putting a big dinner together in the kitchen.

Willard, p.3

Peter needed to see things literally, so he didn't connect things at first when the Resurrected Christ was calling to them from the beach. Instead, the one who recognizes Jesus was the unnamed "Beloved Disciple" – believed to be John, who like Mary of Bethany, was more inclined to look at things from a spiritual perspective. Practical Peter, though, does something irrational – he puts his clothes on, but then leaps into the sea! This suggests that rather than rushing in ahead of everybody to meet Jesus, he was trying to escape, but the infinite sea forced him back to shore. There was no escape and no other choice, but to face Jesus...

This recalls an earlier incident in the 6th chapter of the Gospel of John, when a crowd came to Jesus seeking a free meal of bread, and Jesus explained that his body was the 'bread from heaven' which he offered to them instead.

They were horrified at this – thinking he meant it literally, and as everyone was leaving, Jesus turned to his disciples and asked, "Will you also go away?"

Yet when it seemed that all was lost – that nobody was getting what Jesus is trying to do, bold Simon Peter – the Wise & Strong, says, "To whom shall we go?"

Though it may seem like he was saying, "Please, tell us!" Simon Peter then says, "You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

To whom shall we go?

Fast forward to the shore of Galilee three days after Peter denied even knowing Jesus when he was arrested, how could Peter face him again?

To where could Peter escape? He jumped into the sea like Jonah who tried to sail away from God to go to the ends of the earth, but like Jonah, there was no real practical choice for escape.

Peter should have stayed in the boat, because when Jesus asks for some of the fish they have miraculously caught, it's Peter who goes back on board that boat to haul the fish ashore!

He should have stayed in the boat – like he should not have panicked when Jesus was arrested, put on trial, and put to death.

But there was no practical way he could have known with any certainty, apart from *knowing what Jesus had been telling him*, "The Son of Man (the True Heir of Humanity) must suffer and die, but on the third day rise".

Willard, p.4

This finally came about in a literal way, confronting Simon Peter –
‘Simon son of Jonah’ as Jesus now called him,
to slowly, but surely realize he was loved and forgiven,
accepted and entrusted, no longer as a fisherman,
but as a shepherd with that little flock of apostles
who would go out into the world like lambs amidst wolves
to help others find Jesus in their own beachside sunrise...

As we leave today, I encourage you to follow the path out to the cross
in our Memorial Garden and look to the East for the “Sonrise”.
Take a moment to have your own personal epiphany –
your own encounter with the Resurrected Christ...

Amen

John 21:2-14

² Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathan'a-el of Cana in Galilee,
the sons of Zeb'edee, and two others of his disciples were together.

³ Simon Peter said to them,
"I am going fishing."

They said to him,
"We will go with you."

They went out and got into the boat;
but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach;
yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

⁵ Jesus said to them,
"Children, have you any fish?"

They answered him,
"No."

⁶ He said to them,
"Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some."

So they cast it,
and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish.

⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter,
"It is the Lord!"

When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord,
he put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work,
and sprang into the sea.

⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish,
for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there,
with fish lying on it, and bread.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them,
"Bring some of the fish that you have just caught."

¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore,
full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them;
and although there were so many, the net was not torn.

¹² Jesus said to them,
"Come and have breakfast."

Now none of the disciples dared ask him,
"Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.

¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them,
and so with the fish.

¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples
after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter,

“Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”

He said to him,

“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”

He said to him,

“Feed my lambs.”

¹⁶ A second time he said to him,

“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

He said to him,

“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”

He said to him,

“Tend my sheep.”

¹⁷ He said to him the third time,

“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time,

“Do you love me?”

And he said to him,

“Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said to him,

“Feed my sheep.

¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself
and walked where you would;

but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands,
and another will gird you and carry you
where you do not wish to go.”

¹⁹ (This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.)

And after this he said to him, “Follow me.”