

Sermon, April 19, 2015, Easter 3  
The Rev. Linda Packard

I am beginning this morning with a poem, a short one, only 6 lines long. Its title is The Seeker.

The world is smitten with a god  
who keeps a sharp crease in his pants,  
and whispers, %No! Not like that!+  
Oh, but I love the rumpled God  
who forgets where he lives, forgets  
his own name but never forgets mine.

Joey Garcia [in *Presence*, June 2014, p. 60]

Such is the love of God, love that was incarnate in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. He was born of a human mother, and as a man had a brief earthly ministry walking the dusty and rocky terrain of what is now the state of Israel. Although he is God, that human vessel was tested to its limit, and then beyond, in the arrest, trial and crucifixion decreed by the Roman governor in Jerusalem. Jesus died. We, also human, die. We know that death comes. Death came to Jesus, a painful and messy death.

Those who loved him and had followed him most closely knew where he had been laid at death, in a tomb that was not even his. When the sabbath was over, some women in that group went to anoint his body in the practice of the time, to prepare it for its eternal rest.

What happened next we now call resurrection. At the time it was confusion and terror. When a dead body is placed in a tomb it should stay there. Jesus was gone. The report of the women was largely dismissed by the men; no news there, but no wonder their message was dismissed. It wasn't only that women brought the news. It was the news itself. Is it anything you could understand?

Today's gospel recounts an appearance after the empty tomb had been discovered. These appearances, recorded in Luke and John, show us the inextricably bound up in human and divine nature of Jesus of Nazareth/ Jesus the Christ. They were moments, again, of confusion and terror first, followed by overwhelming relief and joy. Those moments then became of course, moments the disciples wanted to understand. That's how we grapple with events that confuse and terrify us.

But it is difficult to %understand+in a way centered primarily in our brain, a love so great it can conquer death. It is difficult to understand, and even harder perhaps to accept, that the love of God for you is so great that actual death can be overcome. But it did; it is; and these appearances of Christ we hear about in the Easter season affirm for us, over and over again, the truth and the strength of that love.

Like the Exodus for Jews, the Resurrection for Christians is an event that is both historical and totally outside of history. That is, on a particular night God passed over all the homes in Egypt and spared the lives of those in the houses where the blood of the lamb had been sprinkled over the doorway. Yet at the beginning of every passover seder the words are spoken, %How is this night is not like all other nights? On this night the Lord passed over,+and the reality of that deliverance is real as those words are spoken each time, and the living reality of deliverance is celebrated around the table.

On a particular morning in Jerusalem, a tomb was found empty that had contained the body of Jesus of Nazareth. Every Easter we light the new fire and process the candle, %The light of Christ, Thanks be to God+rings out to announce the ongoing reality of this resurrection from the dead. %Alleluia, the Lord is Risen!+we say. Resurrection is historical, but in and for **all** time. And we celebrate the reality of our new life in Christ every Easter.

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The poet is right, you know.

The world is smitten with a god  
who keeps a sharp crease in his pants,  
and whispers, %No, Not like that!+

During his earthly ministry, the moment Jesus had his attention elsewhere, even his disciples were pretty good at badly understanding what Jesus was about. The mother of James and John, %May my sons sit at your right hand in the kingdom?+Disciples complaining about John's closeness to Jesus, %What will happen to him (John)?+Peter, projecting his own fear and wanting to protect Jesus wants to keep him from Jerusalem earning a sharp rebuke, %Get behind me Satan+from Jesus.

So the world has been smitten with confusion for a long time. My own experience of this has been in the parade of wooden crucifixes, from the 50¢ I think, of what I call %the page boy+Jesus. He is a well coiffed, long boned, serene looking figure on a smooth cross, one can imagine %a crease+in the tidy drape of fabric he's wearing. That image populates Episcopal churches closest to where I grew up and grew into the church. %Keep the mess at bay, please!+these crucifixes seem to say.

But in these post Resurrection appearances, Christ shows up rumpled, fresh wounds still on his body. He knows his followers, knows them deeply. He called them by name even on the cross, and now he knows where they are; knows where you are. And he comes to them, unannounced, in their hours of fretful daily life.

He appeared to me the year I worked on an oncology unit in a big teaching hospital; he was still on the cross, rumpled, crumpled even by his posture; wounds fresh, stringy dark hair blowing slightly in some wind I did not feel. He knew where I was, knew where the suffering souls of that unit were, and he came to where it was crazy to worry about well creased pants, or being clueless about %the right way to proceed.+We were all lost, fairly desperate actually, and he found us. I had no answers for the suffering I was with

daily, and they who were suffering were there to try the latest cure, the toughest drug, the newest clinical trial, in order to live.

When is it you can admit how lost you are, like the disciples we see in our lessons that he might come to you? Aware of how dependent you are on a power outside yourself, to get yourself out of the center of the picture, that you might hear what he has to say to you? Well, you're here and that often means you're looking for that space, open to finding that time.

Fred Craddock, one of the finest preachers of our time in my opinion, talked once (oh, more than once, I'm sure) about what happens to you when you keep coming to church, keep listening to scripture, keep letting the gospel under your skin. I think of it as the Chinese Water Torture of scripture. It gets to you, it lands, drop, drop, drop, on your face, on your heart. It does get to you, if you can allow it.

Where do you end up when that process goes on, and on, and on? Well this is what **can** happen. You end up quiet, attentive, heart softened cradled in the hands of Christ. You end up in the lap of God, the rumpled God, and there it can be possible to look outward with the eyes of the Divine. New perspective, new sight, really; sight without judgment, sight full of wonder at what is. The Easter world.

That's a beginning. That's an opportunity to begin to experience, to see, to understand the love of God, a love for us, for all the earth, for all of God's creation, all of which he called ~~very~~ good.+

Ours is an incarnational faith. It is expressed in our concrete bodies, concrete acts, in God entering human life, human activity in the form of a man. all the way from the Jesus who walked in Palestine, to the risen Christ who showed up, wounds and all, on the road, wherever those who loved him gathered, offering himself again, see my wounds, eat bread with me, I will have some fish.

And now we are invited, rumpled us, to show up here for bread and wine. It's God's love again, this time showing up in food for our journey. Come. Eat. As you are, you are loved. Your name is never forgotten.

Luke 24: 26b-48