



**ALL SAINTS CHURCH**  
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

### **We Will Receive Direction**

A Sermon preached by the Rev. J. Edwin Bacon, Jr.  
April 18, 2010

One of the lenses through which we can look at our lives spiritually is to ask ourselves the question whether we have in our lives had as many Easters as we have had Good Fridays.

Three Sundays ago, thousands of people came to this place to celebrate a truth – the truth that proclaims that God raised to new and eternal life the One who was crucified and killed. On Good Friday Jesus had been killed for living a life that insisted that every human being has at his or her core, Goodness, the Beloved, Sacredness. Easter Sunday was about the truth at the core of healthy religion: the message that Goodness, the Beloved, Sacredness is at the center of every human being and that message about our nature WILL ultimately prevail over every other message in the world. This sacred, beloved goodness which is at the core of every human being is honored by God in the resurrection and it is to be honored by the person, him or herself – by you about yourself - and it is to be honored by the structures of society in policies and politics of justice, peace, and inclusion.

But this Easter Sunday experience is not just a once a year event. It is not just a once in a lifetime experience. In the Episcopal church we call every Sunday a little Easter, every Sunday is a celebration of this new life. Furthermore, we are now in the liturgical season of Easter which lasts 50 days – up through the Sunday of the Pentecost. In other words, Easter is an ongoing process. Resurrection is a process that needs to be repeated as well as permeated throughout all of life. If there is anything we can say about the theology of Easter it is that God is interested in bringing new life not only to Jesus, but God is working to bring new life to the crucifixion and death that you have received, or that anybody else has received. God's wants to bring new life wherever crucifixion or death resides in any or every human being on the planet. God is passionately at work trying to make sure that EVERY PERSON has just as many Easters as she or he has had Good Fridays.

God is interested in spiritually rehabilitating every human being in this room and every human being on the planet at the point of our greatest and deepest need, hurt, wound, abuse, offense, trauma, pain, and even death. Last week we read that great story of the spiritual rehabilitation of Thomas. He had not yet had the Easter experience of the first Easter minister, who was named Mary Magdalene, the other Marys, Peter and the rest, of one week earlier. But the very Spirit of God, the risen Christ, came to Thomas and administered exactly what Thomas needed so that he could too could be spiritually rehabilitated.

Now, today, in the stories that we just heard read there is rehabilitation of Peter (John 21: 1-19) and then Paul (Acts 9:1-20). In these stories we see how penetratingly persevering God is in attempting to bring absolutely everyone, including you and me and everybody else on the planet to a

new and free and whole life – whether or not they are friends of God, as in the case of Peter, or even if they are enemies of God, as in the case of Paul.

Peter experienced the resurrection of Jesus in a general way. In my own crazy imagination this is something of the self-talk Peter had going on in his mind. “OK, my friend who meant the world to me, who made me feel whole and free and gave me a life of meaning, that friend, Jesus, though crucified and killed by the Empire because Jesus insisted that everyone was made by God to be whole, free, and significant, that Jesus now is alive. Yes He has appeared to many of his friends now. It was a great moment in my life, but it’s in the past. Now back to the fishing business. Ho-hum. It was great while it lasted. A great chapter of my life. I’ll have lots of great memories to tell the grandkids. But now we have to get on with life as usual. Let’s renew the fishing business license and get out the boats and get back on the Sea of Galilee.”

And although Peter won’t tell the following story I’m about to tell you to his grandkids, there is this gnawing, embarrassing cancer in the center of Peter’s spiritual life about that night three weeks ago - the night Jesus was arrested and he, Peter, denied knowing his friend, Jesus. The naked truth about Peter is that there is something keeping him awake at night about not having been true to his friend Jesus, about having caved to the House of Fear and how that led him to deny even knowing this precious most transformative person that he had ever known. Peter knows about Jesus’ resurrection. That took place two weeks ago on Easter Sunday. Peter does not yet know about his own resurrection. Peter’s own Good Friday was his denying that he knew his friend when the going got tough. Peter doesn’t even have in his theology or spirituality that there can be a resurrection for his own Good Friday.

So on the morning of the story we just read, Jesus comes to show that every Good Friday anyone ever has also has an Easter experience waiting for it.

Jesus is up on the shore grilling breakfast for his friends. Hmmm, bread and fish on the grill. [laughter] I want you to know Jesus was a good cook. He sees his friends out there in the middle of the Sea of Galilee struggling with their business. They are having their own mini Great Recession out in the middle of the sea not catching one fish. Jesus reminds them what he taught them earlier – if they in their lives will just pay attention to God’s voice there is abundant life. So Jesus tells them to fish on the other side of the boat. They obey and they have an amazing catch of fish – 153 the story says – which is a mystical number signifying completion, abundance and universality. Then Jesus bids them come ashore and have breakfast with him.

Jesus bids us to come ashore and have breakfast here at this Table. Jesus then engages Peter in Peter’s own personal Easter. He asks Peter three times if Peter loves him. Three times as a repetition of the three times Peter denied Jesus. And with each response, Jesus tells Peter to feed God’s sheep. “If you love me Peter, you will feed those I care about.” In other words, “I am giving you this Easter appearance, I’m giving you this spiritual rehabilitation. And the rehabilitation will take root, Peter, if you now live your life differently and do all your work not for yourself alone but for the common good. Sometimes Peter, this means changing your business. That’s what it’s going to mean for you, Peter. But sometimes it means doing your business in a different way. But it always means living your life in the ultimate interest of loving your neighbor as yourself. Spiritual rehabilitation is always about Spiritual Transformation.”

In the first story we read this morning, the story about Saul who later becomes known as Paul, Paul has become a persecutor of Christians. That is a Good Friday for Paul. Every time you and I persecute someone else, tell a falsehood about someone else, do not stand up for someone else's intrinsic goodness, let another person be the victim of false witness, we are participating in a Good Friday. The radical, radical message of all the great people in history that was brought home to me by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., when I was growing up in South Georgia was that oppression always has two victims – the person who is being oppressed, yes. That is rather apparent. But in addition, the person who was *participating* in the oppression as a perpetrator or as a silent or otherwise complicit bystander is also being oppressed. That person's humanity is shrinking.

Whether it is prejudice against people of color, whether it is the Christian church in its history of anti-Semitism against Jews, whether it is the current administration in the state of Israel oppressing the people of Gaza, whether it is the church oppressing people who are gay and lesbian and saying that they can't have marriage equality, whether it is the church hierarchy not coming to terms with the abuse of children by priests. Whatever the oppression is it has two victims – that is the Good Friday going on in the body soul of the victim and in the soul of the perpetrator.

Jesus strikes Saul blind in Damascus and for three days he has to be helped around; and he goes without food. Three days, a symbol of being in the grave. I've been to the house where Jesus comes to this holy person and sends that holy person to go and lay hands on Saul in Damascus. Jesus said, "Zelda Kennedy, I want you to go and lay your hands on Rush Limbaugh." [laughter] She says, "Lord, have you been listening to the radio? Have you heard what he's been saying?" The Lord says, "Zelda Kennedy, I don't care. I want you to go and lay your hands on Glen Beck." [laughter] And Saul at the same time has a vision that somebody not of his religion is coming to lay hands on him and that something is going to change and that now he is going to be used as an instrument to spread the good news of universal goodness and belovedness and sacredness to the whole world. God is interested in raising to new life not only the crucified Jesus but God is interested in raising to new life the crucifixion of every being on the planet. And on this Earth Day we should remember that God is interested in raising to new life the crucifixion of this planet itself.

The expert economists tell us that we're not going back to economics as it used to be. This great recession is going to take us to a new place of doing economics in a new way. And the environmentalists tell us that there is no need to argue about whether global warming has taken place; we have global warming and its effects now for two centuries into the future and our life is going to be changed. And if we change our lives and have a resurrection in the oppression of the planet that maybe two hundred years from now the planet can settle back down and be the way it was prior to global warming.

I was struck so much by that volcano last Wednesday in Iceland. If anybody can teach me how to pronounce the name of that volcano, I'll give them a free copy of this sermon. [laughter]

The largest volcano in Iceland had been sleeping for nearly two-hundred years and it woke up on the night of March 20<sup>th</sup>. The first visible sign was a red cloud glowing above the vast glacier that covers it.

Over the next few days, fire fountains began spewing hot magma as high as 300 feet into the sky; lava flowed in molten rivers 60 feet thick. Then last Wednesday the mountain seemed to return to its slumber just prior to an explosion that Wednesday sending a plume of ash more than 30,000 feet into the atmosphere. Then the jet stream picked it up and spread the ash across northern and central Europe – stopped air travel throughout all of Europe. President Obama can't get to Poland for the State Funeral tomorrow, musicians couldn't get to their venues to play their concerts, people couldn't have their organ replacement surgeries because the organs couldn't be flown to the hospitals. Can we see that as a call from God to look at the interdependence of all of us and the planet? To call us to a new life, a new resurrection?

Here is Jeremy Rifkin describing the kind of life we have to move into. Now, mind you I don't exactly know what he is talking about here but I'm going to read to you a paragraph that is very impressive and poetically and scientifically has the ring of truth in it. [laughter]

Rifkin says, "The biosphere is the narrow band that extends some forty miles from the ocean floor to outer space where living creatures and the Earth's geochemical processes interact to sustain each other. We are learning that the biosphere functions like an indivisible organism. It is the continuous symbiotic relationships between every living creature and between living creatures and the geochemical processes that ensure the survival of the planetary organism and the individual species that live within its biospheric envelope. If every human life, the species as a whole, and all other life-forms are entwined with one another and with the geochemistry of the planet in a rich and complex choreography that sustains life itself, then we are all dependent on and responsible for the health not only for ourselves and one another but for the whole organism. Carrying out that responsibility means living out our individual lives in neighborhoods and communities in ways that promote the general well-being of the larger biosphere within which we dwell." (Jeremy Rifkin, *Tarcher/Penguin* Posted on March 27, 2010, Printed on April 17, 2010, <http://www.alternet.org/story/146196/> )

God wants to rehabilitate all of us spiritually, to engage all of us in a new choreography of new life and resurrection. To stop abusing ourselves, to stop abusing one another, to receive forgiveness from God for all that is in the past and call us now at this breakfast (gesturing to the Eucharistic Table) with Jesus to feed God's sheep. To care for ourselves and for one another and for the world. And above all, to make sure that in every place we have a Good Friday we know that there is an Easter Sunday waiting to heal us, transform us, empower us and send us out into the world as Easter people.

Amen.