

### 3 Easter, Year C: 14 April 2013

The other day someone thanked me for my Easter letter. It had spurred this person to a lot of thought, they said. Then they asked, "Do you think the Easter Story is true, Fr. Theo?" I never got a chance to respond, however. While I was formulating my response they answered their own question. "It must be true. I don't think the church would have survived for 2000 years if it wasn't."

We didn't have any more opportunity to talk, but I presume that what was meant was the traditional Christian story: the cross, the death, the resurrection. As I was driving home I kept thinking of this conversation and the unflinching conviction: "It must have been true or the church would not have survived for 2000 years."

Now, most of the biblical scholars I respect have demonstrated that the physical resurrection is midrash or mythological. Even Paul seems to go out of his way to debunk those who believe in the physical resurrection when he writes to the Corinthians "...of course the resurrection was spiritual. What goes into the ground is physical. What comes out is spiritual."

On the other hand it seems like my friend had a point. We often say things like "Time will tell." Or, "It has passed the test of time." I mean, it isn't a bad assumption to think that something that has passed the test of time is true or truth. But it seems to me that if we use the same test for a truth in religion we have a bit of a problem. There are at least five or six major religions active in the world today like Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Taoism, and Shintoism, and all are older than Christianity. Are they therefore "more true" according to my friend's test I wondered? I doubt that the followers of those ancient traditions would think too highly of the traditional idea that Christ is the one and only way.

Then it hit me. In a way my friend is right! Christianity has survived the long time not because the "facts" are true but because the message is true; the teachings are true. Forget about the mythology that the ancients wrapped around the story of Jesus to try and communicate to others who he was to them. Forget about trying to make what we read about Jesus in our scriptures conform to historical fact the way we judge "facts" today. What is true are those timeless lessons that Jesus left his followers and ultimately us. What is true is that anyone can experience the "Kingdom" or the Realm of God if they are willing to behave and think a certain way.

What is true is that if we ever experienced that Realm,  
we would not want to live any other way.  
And then that Jesus told his followers, and ultimately us, how to do it.  
He told us that he could not do it for us.  
He said that it is up to us to choose to walk the path.  
It is up to us to learn to live a certain way,  
to think a certain way and to be a certain way.  
It is up to us to develop the eyes to see, the ears to hear our world imbued with spirit  
and to live the message as if every living being is part of the Sacred Unity.

What is true is that when we learn to take responsibility for our actions,  
make amends for those whom we have harmed  
and change what we have to change, so that it will not happen again,  
then our lives will be different.  
We will begin to live more harmoniously  
with the Ultimate Creative force and with all creation.  
And we will begin to experience a true freedom.

What is true is that if we begin to trust  
the Universe filled with an energy that wills the well-being of all creation,  
we might discover that everything that we do,  
every action we take, every mistake that we make  
becomes a new lesson and an opportunity.  
And if we learn from those lessons and put them in perspective  
we will begin to live a full and spiritually fulfilling life.

What is true is that if we want to stop feeling lonely,  
if we want to stop feeling isolated,  
if we want to discover the divinity within others and in ourselves,  
we have to learn how to stop judging others.  
For as long as we are judging others, we are judging ourselves,  
we are judging the world and we are judging God the Creator.

What is true is that learning to forgive others and ourselves  
is the first step to true freedom.  
If we want to move forward with our lives,  
if we want to lift the burdens from our back and remove the stones from our hearts,  
we must learn to forgive those whom we believe have harmed us.  
Carrying the weight of anger, of judgment, of hurt around,  
because we cannot let it go, is simply debilitating.

What is true is the need to love with divine nature,  
with the love of a mother who longs for her unborn child.  
When we learn to love our neighbor, even our enemies as we love ourselves,  
all of the false barriers, the humanly created tribal lines will fall away.

When we reach out in compassion to one who needs us,  
or can learn from us, or can be healed by us,  
then we discover the spark of divine in another  
and in the process the spark of divine in ourselves.  
And then we will realize the truth at some level that we are one.  
And we will know that we are no longer isolated amoebas floating around in space.  
We live in God's world and we are not alone.

What is true is that if we want to experience the Realm of God,  
we need to live with a generous heart.  
We need to be generous with our love, with our time, with our assets.  
When we hold back, when we hold on, when we try and control and hoard anything,  
it will rot in our hearts, it will spoil in our storage units,  
it will build up spiritual cholesterol in our lives.  
Jesus taught that we should not worry about what we eat,  
what we drink or what we wear or how long we will live.  
What is true is that when we live with a generous heart  
we learn that our attachments can become our prison  
and we can discover how to be free.

What is true is that Jesus taught that life is a gift, a rare and precious opportunity.  
If we treat it like a gift to be cherished, to be celebrated, to be appreciated,  
our lives will take on new meaning.  
Our death will have no sting.  
Life is an opportunity, not a chore that we must simply get through.

Jesus did not necessarily do something for us through his death;  
he did something for us through his life.  
He taught his followers with parables and ultimately he became a parable.  
And then he told his followers to "go and do likewise";  
"Love me and feed my lambs, tend my sheep."  
In other words the rest is up to us.  
We still have to live it; we still have to risk it; we still have to become it.

It means that we have to rethink our values, our priorities, our lives.  
It means we have to learn to trust the sea of infinite mystery;  
to give up some of the control we tenaciously hold on to.  
It means we have to let go of the attachments that we believe define us.  
It means we have to stop trying to be number one  
or feeling badly because we are not number one  
and learn how to live as one with the universe.  
It means we have to stop valuing who and what we are  
by what we have and what we control  
and start valuing ourselves by who we are within;  
by how we learn to love...as beloved children of the Universe,  
made in the image and likeness of God.

Jesus shared the truth that the Realm of God,  
that ultimate relationship with God and with each other,  
was available to anyone.  
That is the “good news” that we that we should celebrate on Easter Sunday;  
that is the good news that we should celebrate every day.  
How can you know that it is true?  
Jesus said: “You will know by the fruit that it bears.’  
In other words, you will know by the peace, the fulfillment,  
by the contentment, by the joy that it brings to you.  
You will know it by living it.  
And to that I say, alleluia!

*While the sentiments of this sermon are entirely mine, the words are entirely those of  
The Rev. Fred Plumer and posted on the website of Progressive Christianity.*

*<https://progressivechristianity.org/resources/it-must-be-true-easter/>*