

Beyond Preliminary Things ~ Easter 4-04-10

Luke 24:1-2; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Jesus' life was made up of a series of events that have been recorded for us in the gospels. We are not certain who the writers of these books of the Bible were, but we do know that they wove together stories of his life into a rich tapestry for us to read, to ponder and from which to learn.

We read in one place that he welcomed little children, in another that he taught through parables, making difficult ideas easy to understand for those who listened. We read about miracles and healings and about a Prodigal Son and a Good Samaritan. We read about the two commandments he held above all others, "To love the Lord your God with all your heart and strength and mind and your neighbor as yourself."

This past week we have focused on events leading up to his death. The joyful entrance into Jerusalem, the night in the Upper Room where he celebrated what we have come to call the "Last Supper," the arrest, the trial and his crucifixion. We learn much from these stories of his life, stories that seek to instruct us on the right way to live, on the right way to share what he revealed to us of God.

All of the events we look at, as we learn about him, are "preliminary things" that lead us to the grand promise of eternal life.

Years ago I found a little piece of poetry written on the inside cover of a book and credited to that famous person, John or Jane Anonymous. I liked the verse so much that I gave the book to a friend, who was a pastor, for his use. As time went by, I could recall a few of the words and I hoped I could locate the poem entitled "Preliminary Things," that had stayed with me so long. Of course, my search came to fruition through the wonder of the Internet. I typed, "I love preliminary things" in that little box, hit "go" and there it was. Still written by an anonymous person, someone who only went by the initials, "JSJ" and which appeared in the "Sunday Times" on March 25, 1922. Here is that little poem, "Preliminary Things":

I love preliminary things
 The tuning of flutes and strings
 The little scales musicians play
 In varying keys to feel their way
 The hum - the hush in which it dies
 But most to see the curtain rise

I LOVE preliminary things
 The little box the postman brings
 To cut the twine, to break the seals
 And wonder what the lid reveals
 To lift the folds in which it lies
 And watch the gift materialize

The snowdrop and the daffodil

The catkins hanging straight and still
 The blossom on the orchard trees -
 Do you know any joy greater than these?
 Each represents the hope that springs
 In ALL preliminary things

This morning we have gathered here to celebrate the rising of the curtain that kept veiled the goal toward which the life of Jesus and our lives are moving. We have come to celebrate the resurrection of the one we call our “Lord,” as he moved on to the next level of life promised him by God.

Then, as now, this event is a mystery for us. It is one of those times when we say, “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.” It is a time when we want to be stirred into the certainty that what came to the founder of our faith will come, too, to us. We want to know that the preliminary events in our lives will lead us to a better, more beautiful place. We want to know that all our joys and struggles, our good times and our most devastating times all add up to something. We want to know that if we follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we will move forward to an eternal life spent in the presence of God.

We would have liked to have been there, peeking into that tomb and hearing the glad message that “He is risen, He is risen, indeed,” then running as fast as we could with hearts pounding and feet flying, to spread the news to the others who had followed him. Running in fear and in joy, not knowing what it was that had happened to the one we had loved so dearly. Then, there was the sadness of having those we told, respond with, “It’s just an idle tale.” How crushing that must have been. But, Peter, his curiosity stirred, went back to the tomb and took a look and discovered that what the women had told him was true. Jesus was not there. Then, where was he?

As those early followers hid together in fear and grief, they must have considered all that might have happened. He might have been stolen, taken away by the Romans and put somewhere else. He was a popular figure to those of the lower class and feared by those who thought he might have come to overthrow them in one way or another. It took those disciples a while, as it would any of us, to consider those “preliminary things” he had accomplished in his life and to put the puzzle together. It took them a while to remember what he had told them about his death and about his coming resurrection.

We continue to wonder what happened to this day. We would like to put on our Sherlock Holmes’ hats and uncover all the clues that lead us to him. But, distance and time separate us from his life and his death and his resurrection. We move forward and we believe on the basis of hope and faith. We listen to the stories of his life and study his teachings and ponder where it is we will spend eternal life.

I don’t have any easy answers for you this morning. I do know I believe in a loving and caring God who only wants the best for God’s creatures. I believe that we do journey on into the next level of life although I cannot tell you what that will be like, I know that all the preliminary things in my life—all the ups and downs, the joys and sorrows, the times of hardship and the times of some ease cannot be for nothing. We journey on and as we have come from God, so we return to God. No matter how our fellow humans may judge us and find us wanting, we are the beloved children of God. As such we will move on beyond preliminary things. We know this, because, on this glad morning “He is risen, He is risen, indeed.”

-- Amen