

The Author of Life

Acts 3:12-19; I John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36-48; Psalm 4 4-26-09

Many of us here are readers. I know this from the great number of books that are recommended to me, and, that are often simply handed to me. I have always been a reader. So much so, that my mother would hesitate to have me clean up the attic from time to time, knowing that I would settle into some comfortable space and spend my “cleaning time” reading anything and everything I found in those cozy corners. I haunted the library in town, walking the two miles or so back and forth several times each week in the summer, while inhaling large numbers of books. As I recall, I read as I walked. The creaky floors of that old library and the wonderful smell of books stay with me still. I can see in my mind’s eye the old wooden table holding the stereopticon and the wonderful slides and postcards we could look at if we were very careful—and we were for a librarian was always observing us. I even remember the name of one of the books I read over and over, one entitled Water Babies.

Right now I am re-reading Albert Schweitzer’s The Quest of the Historical Jesus, while reading anew Jhumpa Lahiri’s, The Namesake, Eckhardt Tolle’s, A New Earth, while finishing up Nathaniel Philbrick’s Mayflower. I have also added Dead Souls by Nikolai Gogol online. I rarely have 5 books going at once but these are so diverse I can manage them all.

Our taste in books varies. Some of us like novels, others only works of non-fiction. Some enjoy the meter of poetry while that form makes others become a little crazy when trying to figure out just what it is a particular poet is saying.

Through all our reading we often discover an author whose style and content meshes with where we are at a particular time in life. When this happens, we might say that an author “speaks to us.”

Jesus never wrote anything down, that we know of, to be preserved, that told of his life and teachings or his philosophy of life. Others created the records we have of the way he lived and moved and had his being. For years the early followers believed that he would return in their lifetimes and take them with him into the next level of life. When this did not happen and his closest followers became elderly and began to die, the stories they knew and heard of Jesus were written down. Many of the letters we find in our New Testament were composed and circulated years before the gospels were written.

Through the words of these writers Jesus became the author of the way life was to be lived. Instead of through prose or poetry he tried to show those, who followed him through the years, how they could become the best humans God wanted them to become. If we choose to live the way he did we will have lives of abundance—not in a material sense but in ways of spiritual growth that take us on to the next level of life.

His post-resurrection appearance in the gospel of Luke helped explain to his disciples that he had journeyed on and that they would, also. We cannot blame them for their disbelief. Nothing that they had seen had prepared them for what had happened after their Master had died. They just didn’t get it—he was a mystery. So, the authors of our gospels tried to help those who would read these works more fully understand just who he was and the message he had come to deliver.

Acts explains that the Author of life had been killed to fulfill prophecy and that the disciples, Peter and John, in this case, were going on in the name and spirit of Christ to further his mission. Our story tells us, that they had healed a man who had been lame from birth. They were trying to clear up any misunderstanding those who had known or heard about Jesus might have. They turned again to the way his life and death fulfilled the prophecy of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Our little Letter of John focuses on Jesus as the gift of love that came to us from God to help us discover the best way to live. If and when we are able to live with love as our highest goal, we find that our lives change dramatically and that we manage to walk along paths that are right in the eyes of God.

I have had people tell me that this is true, as difficult as it is. When we have those times when we are at our best, when we do not sit in judgment of others, when we do not put ourselves first, when we realize that others have value in what they say and do, when we cease believing that our way is the only way to do things, when we forgive, when we have infinite patience, life changes for the better for us and all those we touch. In this way Jesus is revealed in us and through us and we carry on his legacy.

This is what his message is all about. The disciples were commissioned to carry on in his name, as are we. When we realize this we truly become the best we can be.

There is a famous quote from Schweitzer's The Quest of the Historical Jesus that has often spoken to me when I have stopped to puzzle over the meaning of Jesus for my own life and his place in the history of the world. Pastors have their questions, too, and often we struggle for a more complete understanding of who Jesus was and what he means for our lives and the lives of our people. Schweitzer penned"

He comes to us as one unknown, without a name, as of old by the lakeside he came to those men who did not know who he was. He says the same words, "Follow Me!", and sets us to those tasks which he must fulfill in our time. He commands. and to those who hearken to him, whether wise or unwise, he will reveal himself in the peace, the labours, the conflicts and the suffering that they may experience in his fellowship, and as an ineffable mystery they will learn who he is..... (p. 497)

Through work and reading and reflection we, as those disciples of old, more present day scholars, may come to a clearer understanding of who Jesus was and what his life means to us. We may discover in many ways just how he was and is the Author of life. It is always worth the effort, no matter how difficult our own quest may become to try to see him more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more nearly day by day.

--Amen