

Once You Know the Whole Story

Second Sunday of Easter

Earth Day Celebration

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Texts: Psalm 104;
1 Peter 1.3-9;
John 20. 19-31

Two weeks ago Pastor Beth posted something on her Facebook page. Shocking – right? She wrote: “Funny how learning a bit of one's story allows me to have grace for someone I'd normally find irritating....” When I saw it I told her that I just had a conversation with Gordon that very week about a person in my life who had rubbed me the wrong way for a long time. And in the humorous providence of God I found myself spending far more time with this person. The more time we spent in close proximity the more we shared. As I came to know a bit more of this person's story and shared a bit more of my own the more connected I was feeling. I recognize that I was coming to love this person who can still rub me the wrong way from time to time but it sits in a very different place in my spirit now. My mind doesn't disconnect me to go on some silent rant of how I want to fix this person as it once did.

This week I was listening to a class by Bonnie Badenock on what she calls the Embodied Brain.¹ The piece of her teaching that I want to share here has to do with how the different hemispheres (the different sides) of our brain lead us to relate to each other. Up until the industrial revolution we tended to lead out of the right side of our brains. But ever since the advent of manufacturing and business and city life – as we are increasingly disconnected from nature – most of us now live predominantly if not exclusively from the left side of our brains.

¹ **The Myth of Self-Regulation** by Bonnie Badenock, MA, LMFT – online Master Class from the website: www.soundstrue.com

When we can come at life and especially relationships from the right side of our brain we are able to enter those encounters open to the present moment and curious about what will unfold naturally between us. We are focused on the quality of the connection between. When we come at life and relationships with our left brain as dominant, we are often trying to pull apart the things people are sharing so we can understand more fully how it all works. We are listening but often for the place where our prior knowledge could be useful in fixing what is wrong rather than following the person in front of us as they discover for themselves what their whole story is all about.

Bonnie's testimony was that as she was able to lead from the right side of her brain while being supported and assisted by the left, she found in her counseling practice that the healing process for people would emerge almost on its own. By the way - the fastest way to help you come into the right side of your brain is to go spend time in nature....something we will come back to later.

Holding those insights about the embodied brain let's look at this text again from John chapter 20. We often look at Thomas in this story as the disciple with inferior faith. The really good disciples - the ones we want to emulate - are the ones who believe without needing proof. They are the ones who can just hear the words "Peace be with you" and their fear falls away. It seems as if Jesus himself points us in this direction when he concludes the conversation with Thomas by saying "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet come to believe."

I no longer hear this comment as an indictment of Thomas but rather as a word of blessing and empathy even for all of us who come after him; who can't have the same experience with Jesus that Thomas has here in this text today. I no longer see Thomas as some stubborn rationalist who needs verifiable evidence before he will step out in faith. I see him as someone who has been traumatized and needed an opportunity to connect with Jesus before his fear could give way to faith.

He needed to connect with Jesus in a way that took account of all that Thomas had witnessed: both the physical torture of Jesus' body but also the

way that witnessing that trauma was reverberating through his own body and mind and spirit. It wasn't so much about believing that it was true that Jesus had been raised so much as trusting what it could all mean. Jesus offers that space to Thomas to take in the whole story without Thomas even asking for it. The moment Jesus walks in the room he gives Thomas what he needs: not just words of peace but the chance to connect with his body to the unbelievable good news that everything Jesus had taught them about the realm of God as a place where love will triumph is true! The hate of the world had done its worst violence against Jesus and it did not destroy his love. He remained who he was to his very last breath and even death itself could not contain the power of God's love. Here it was - the love of God - standing in front of him offering with kindness exactly what he needed. Knowing the whole story made it possible for him to trust the faith that had been buried under his fear: "My Lord and my God!"²

We get to see in the story of Thomas what the writer of first Peter describes for us today. What it looks like when God gives us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We get to watch Thomas step into the inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading; an inheritance that the writer of first Peter talks about as being kept for us in heaven. 1 Peter continues the word of blessing to those of us come after those first disciples: "Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls."³

Remember that sermon a few weeks ago as we were coming into the season of Lent when I offered the perspective of the book I read this fall called *Grounded* by Diana Butler Bass? Her reading of the Hebrew scriptures was leading her to say that maybe heaven is not some light years away in some other realm disconnected from our time and place but in fact the place where heaven and earth meet might just begin at our feet - that heaven is all around - by which we mean that God is all around us.

² John 20.28, NRSV

³ 1 Petr 1.8-9, NRSV

One way to read Psalm 104 is to see that the psalmist (in coming to understand the whole story of God's life with us) begins to see God everywhere. The psalmist understands how utterly dependent we are not only on God as the one who creates us but on God as the one who saves us from self-destruction and mutual annihilation. So the psalmist wants to remain connected to God as the source of life and salvation. He begins to recognize that that God is all around him. The creation itself not only proclaims the majesty of God with us but in a mystical way actually contains the majesty of God.

I am convinced that the very best way we can honor Earth Day is to join the Psalmist in immersing ourselves in creation: to get outside and feel the light wrapping us as a garment; to feel the messages of the winds blowing past us; to put our feet and sink our toes into the dirt and feel the foundation of the earth beneath us; to stand on the porch in the middle of a thunderstorm and feel the power of rebuke reverberate through your body; or to stand at the foot of a mountain or the edge of the sea and see the boundaries and the majesty of such vastness. I wanted to read the full text of this Psalm so we could share the experience of full immersion that Psalmist clearly intends for us. You immediately recognize that for the Psalmist - as for most naturalists that I know --- the earth itself is their sanctuary. It is the place where God is revealed; that thin place where it feels as if there is very little separating heaven and earth.

If that is true - as the Psalmist suggests - that the natural world is not just a metaphor but in a mystical way I cannot explain is the place where God is both revealed and experienced then caring for creation is not just some good, ethical idea. It is a primary place where we come to know and love God -- a place that can quite literally shift us into our right minds so that we can show up for the people in our life in ways that strengthen our connections and open the possibility of healing.

If knowing the whole story of a person's life can help us to bring a greater measure of care to the people around us, the same is true for the natural world. The deeper our understanding for how this whole ecosystem works the more care we will bring to our place within it.

So the very best way we can honor the Word that is before us – from the story of Thomas and Jesus – to the blessing of 1 Peter – to the song of the psalmist --- is to get outside and to immerse ourselves in the beauty of the earth.

This is the place that will help us feel connected to the God who created us and to the peace that Jesus seeks to breath on us...so that we can re-enter life ready to be part of the new birth into a living hope that this season of Easter is all about!

Thanks be to God!