Third Sunday of Easter Year B

All Saints’ Church April 15, 2018

Acts 3:12-19 1 John 3:1-7

Psalm 4 Luke 24:36b-48

We thank you Jesus for all the ways you Easter within us. Amen

I had the good fortune of having Mark Zuckerberg as one of my students. Or maybe I should say, (a bit audacious I admit), that he had the good fortune of having me as a teacher.

No matter what, it was difficult to watch him walk down the hall and into the chambers of Senate for his grilling about the abuses of Facebook. I felt for him, as I would feel for any of my students. He looked frightened, worried about his future, the weight of the world on his shoulders, serious, uncertain, maybe guilty and sorry, and uncomfortable in a suit and tie and dress shirt that looked just a little bit too big for him.

I had him as a senior, in the spring of 2002 in my Introduction to Western Philosophy class. Every student at Exeter had to take at least one religion course, and kids were drawn to this course, “because it’s the least religious of them all.” The students were smart, interestingly, mostly male, and ready to share their world view, their philosophy which they believed could stand up to the scrutiny of Plato, Hume, Kant, Jesus and Descartes.

In summary, this is what they defended: (1) Individualism; (2) Materialism; (3) the notion that Technological Progress is always good, and all that can do done, should be done; (4) that the “remaking” of “developing countries” to correspond with Western values and norms was the goal; and (5) if you could, controlling folks for corporate profits was a good business plan.

And so, we discussed the affairs of the world and their ethical lives through philosophical discourse. My role was to try to make them uncomfortable. And maybe just to hesitate/reflect a bit on the certainty of their positions by throwing out challenges to 3rd world debt, limited water resources, out of control gun freedoms, inequity of the death penalty, lack of climate control, and that 80% of the world’s goods were controlled and consumed by 20% of the world’s population. Did they have any responsibility to these issues or was it all about “progress” and making money and defending social Darwinism?

Was I just some old-fashioned societal ugly duckling, destined to never be a swan?

One day, we were discussing the advances of DARPA (the government agency that brought us the internet, the world-wide-net, which no one thought would be possible) in creating a chip that could be placed in your neurological system within your brain, which would give you a photographic memory. (By the way, this is real research, with real progress).

“What a good idea- sign me up!”

“What about a chip that could make you stronger, make you faster, reduce your need for sleep?” I asked. (Again, real research, with real progress).

“Excellent idea.”

And then a student asked if we weren’t crossing a line, and in our efforts to be able to do more, becoming more machine-like and less human. And another student said, “That’s just part of the evolutionary plan; we will become more machine like, but why is that less human? People two hundred years ago would think of us now as more machine like, with our replaced knees, heart valves, glasses, prostheses, anti-depression medicines. It’s just progress, get used to it.”

The class erupted, everyone speaking at the same time, with passion, upset, and questions. I let them go at it. Maybe a little alarmed at what I viewed as the “apocalypse of the heart.” I’m sure I was sighing, but I did come up with a great question at the end of the class: “Your assignment for tomorrow is to define what it means to be human; one page, no more than 300 words.”

Our gospel passage this morning is all about Jesus’ humanity; funny thing since he is dead and now risen again, far from what we think of being human. Isn’t Easter about Jesus’ divinity?

Yet, the Events of Easter are so grounded in human blood and guts reality: the stone rolled away, the linens left behind, the conversations of angels, Mary Magdalene lost in the garden, reports of Jesus in rooms, walking with folks on the road to Emmaus, eating at an inn, cooking breakfast over a fire on the beach, breathing on us, exposing his wounds, his hands, his feet, “See that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

And then he asks the disciples, like our teenagers who come storming into our kitchens and opening up our fridges, “Have you anything here to eat?”

As he chews on his piece of broiled fish, Jesus is showing off his humanity, not his divinity, and there’s a reason. God’s indwelling in our heart is what helps us to know who we are, how we call ourselves, and where we are going, and what it means for us to be flesh and bones. Jesus showing off his divinity is not going to help us with these human things. In these human things, we find our way into our faith.

And yet, we want divinity to come in and save us. In the void, society has risen to the challenge and presented its form of “divinity”- perfection and happiness and results: make money, be successful, win, don’t be vulnerable, watch your back, take care of #1. And most of all, believe in the myth that the success of your capacity to achieve is of utmost importance and tied to your worth. You’re either a winner or loser- deal!

These are our idols as our psalmist reminds us, “Oh how long will you worship ***dumb*** idols and run after false gods?

I call it the Great Beauty Contest of Life and its appeal is seductive. And by the way, if you live by this contest, you might as well be a ghost.

When Jesus comes back in his body, bruised, pierced, bleeding, he is not coming back to join the Beauty Contest. He is coming back ***to save humanity FROM the beauty contest***, not ***FOR the beauty contest***.

Jesus is showing off his humanity, not his divinity, to invite us deeper into our own humanity, as well, which knows a few things, naturally:

“Just to be is a blessing, just to live is holy.” (Abraham Joshua Heschell)

Relationships that stress authenticity, mutuality, dignity, and vulnerability are life-giving.

There is no “other”; we are all connected in this thing we call living and our redemption is tied to each other.

Sometimes, some of our greatest gifts come as unanswered prayers.

If I could teach my philosophy class again, I think I would start here, with things that our spirit speaks… insights, God-inspired, God-existent because God’s indwelling spirit is contained in all life. We are wise, because God is wise. Insights given to us at birth, which have the capacity to save us from our false self, our damning hell, which tempts us to throw away our life, all in the name of achieving some kind of pretend divinity.

We just have to be encouraged to look for sign-posts that point to community, to trust in our deep longings to be real, and to pay attention when our heart begins to beat faster.

We are just like Adam and Eve, easily tempted to want to be like God, rather than to be our messy, limited, confused, painful, delightful, hopeful Self. How do we live into the gift of Self, the gift of our humanity? Which by the way Jesus died in order to save?

It starts, with our response to Jesus, when he turns to us and says, “Hey, what’s there to eat?”

Our response matters: “Let’s sit down Jesus; let’s share a meal; we have so much to talk about!”