

Reflection Notes: April 20, 2014

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These notes formed the outline for the reflection I offered on Easter Sunday at the Gazebo at Lake Ontario Park in Rochester, NY – April 20, 2014. If you take time to read this, thank you. I always welcome your comments, suggestions, and ongoing conversation. I'm easy to reach at Bagnuolo@gmail.com or 914.217.4173 (voice and text). Also, this is not carefully edited, leaving room for the Holy Spirit – as well as a bit of rest! Happy Easter and Peace to you. Ray

[Bulletin can be found here.](#)

After the tomb...

This is about joy. It is about the dawn, the morning sun, the springing forth from the tomb – and all about joy.

And, in some ways, it is about our discounting of joy as something silly, giddy, almost irrational.

Funny, isn't it? That the one thing we perhaps hope for the most as a steady state of being, we often think of as a condition that needs treatment, especially if it appears too enthusiastic, too demonstrative, too – much information.

I think that some of this has to do with the perception that the world is not too joyful of a place. "Joy to the world" – is a phrase that evokes the sense that there is none or not enough. It's sung almost as a command: "Joy to the world. Joy!" As in an imperative, active verb. Joy! I tell you! Joy!!!

And where goes Joy in sorrow or pain. We all know that place. Such sorrow that it eclipses the joy that at other times we see everywhere. Sometimes it feels like eternal joy v. the human condition!

And, we're not alone. I doubt that there was much joy following the execution of Jesus. In fact, the text tells us there was great fear and desperation; the grieving Mary of Magdalene and Mary mother of James and Salome arriving at the tomb early in the morning, to "see the grave" – almost as a confirmation of what they had yet come to believe -- the Jesus they loved was gone.

But, do catch the joy of the Messenger in this reading from the Aramaic. The Messenger who knows the truth. The Messenger rolls away the stone from the tomb in front of the witnesses – who were so frightened they stood like stone themselves. And then the Messenger sits atop the stone. You can almost see the angel, cross-legged, arms folded, knowing smile... "Be not afraid. [Sure!] Behold, the one you seek is not here. He is risen as he told you he would be. Come in, take a look. See for yourself."

And without even a short description of that moment in the tomb, as soon as they looked and saw it empty – there was no reason to stay, no reason to linger, so the Messenger broke the spell and sent them forth: “Go quickly – Jesus goes before you.”

And these very human women, stunned, fearful, joyful, doubting – went.

Did you ever wonder why? I mean, why not run the other way?

It occurs to me, now and then, that there is a bit of “irrational thinking” involved in being faithful and hopeful and believing. That faced with devastating suffering – we still want to believe, desperately to believe. Almost, at times, feeling as though there is no space for sorrow and belief.

For me, belief is always there, undergirding it all. Belief, Joy, God.

It’s just that that damn tomb gets in the way of remembering. The incomprehensibility of death; the fear; that stone in front of the tomb – the finality of it all – all gets in the way.

And now an Angel sits upon it all, flicks it away like a pesky insect – death as an insect! - legs crossed, arms folded – knowing smile, saying: “Be not afraid...go quickly. You will find who you seek. The tomb is empty. Nothing to fear here. Nothing to fear, anymore...”

And the unspoken rejoinder: Be joyful, for you have much in which to rejoice.

Friends, Jesus never died. Jesus’ resurrected spirit always was. “In the beginning, is now, and forever shall be.” But we needed assurance. Another quirky characteristic of the human condition. Weren’t all of Jesus’ teachings in one way or another about the truths and commandments that had been forgotten, dropped from practice, replaced by pomp and hypocrisy? Weren’t his arguments all framed in what he once said to Nicodemus:

“Are you the teacher of Israel and you don’t understand these things? I tell you the solemn truth, we speak about what we know and testify about what we have seen, but you and the people do not accept our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?” John 3:10-12

So the tomb.

It seems we needed the lesson of the tomb.

Lesson done.

The Risen Spirit of Jesus gone before us, beckoning us to believe and to follow and fear not, to be joyful... for he in God and God in he is with us always. With all those we love, always. With those we dislike, always.

Friends, we have been in the tomb. There is nothing there; we walk in the deep joy that rises in sorrow, if we allow it - knowing the tomb is not the terminus, just the place of resurrection for what we have always known...the voyage home.

We can complicate it with the questions that our critical minds raise. But we are more than our minds, and besides the questions and the critical studies, the sometimes fear and sometimes sorrow – and even the irrational aspect of believing in a rational world – we are more than our minds and more than of this world. The tomb-lesson teaches us that, as well.

The tomb narrative then becomes a question: What now. Who are we on this side of the tomb? Do we circle back around and around wringing our hands and our analyzing minds into a state of paralysis and absent faith. Or have we changed? What does it mean to be “out of the tomb people”?

Do we believe into the morning joy of each day, walking with the risen Jesus, born again of the spirit of a world that has been raised and is held by the One of Many Names –

The One who calls us forward into life here on our way beyond here, with only one command – To love your God and love one another.

That command shatters the stone and leaves the tomb barren for all to see; shattering all the fear that it ever held.

To be risen is to be free in the Love of God. To be risen is to be more than we are humanly made to be – this side of the tomb shows us the way with the Risen Jesus going before us.

Alleluia, indeed.

Be joyful and believe in such things, for they are True.

Amen