

# *The Sunnybrook Pulpit*

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## **Easter and Earth Day**

*Jesus said, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my 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." – Luke 24:36b-48*

This morning is the fourth Sunday in the season of Easter, a season to celebrate the good news that God's work in the world was not defeated by the powers of sin and death. Today is also Earth Day, a day to recommit ourselves to the conviction that God's good creation will not ultimately be destroyed by those same powers. And so we can celebrate both Easter and Earth Day this morning, in trust that there is a deep link between the two.

The good news that we celebrate in the church is not that someday we will escape this world and go to heaven, as if this life and this world doesn't matter. The good news is instead that God is at work in this life and this world to bring us to abundant and eternal life, that we are not alone. That means this good creation matters to God, and that what we do in this life matters in eternity.

When the risen Jesus appeared to those first disciples, one of the first things he said to them was, "Do you have anything here to eat?" It is a thoroughly ordinary question. You can probably remember yourself asking that question, standing there with the fridge door open. Or you can imagine your kids or grandkids doing the same thing, standing there before a fridge stuffed with leftovers. "Do we have anything to eat?" It is a very ordinary question, and it is the very ordinariness of it that expresses its importance. If Jesus came to your home, he would come to your kitchen and snoop in the fridge and ask exactly the same question. In fact, he probably has. You just didn't recognize him.

For the story of Jesus' resurrection is not the story of the visitation of a ghost, nor the resuscitation of a corpse, but the affirmation of life as it is meant to lived. Jesus comes back to life, life in community, life in the body, life in the good creation of God. That affirms the story of the Bible, from beginning to end, from the goodness of God's creation at the beginning to the holy city with its trees of life at the end. And it affirms the story of Jesus from beginning to end, from his birth in the

humblest of circumstances, to his death in the cruelest of circumstances, to his return in the most ordinary of circumstances. Easter is the story of God's affirmation of life against those forces of destruction and death.

And so this morning, in our Easter faith we gather to celebrate that God continues to bring life out of death, to welcome home those who have lost their way, to rescue those who have been imprisoned by destructive patterns of life. Earth Day is the recognition that just as individuals can lose their way in violence and addictions, so also societies can lose their way. We have lost our way. In our pride and short-sightedness, we have lost sight of the importance of the natural systems in which we live and on which we depend. We have been tempted and misled in the belief that we are separate and apart from the earth. We are addicted to unsustainable patterns of living and we need to learn anew how to live with respect in creation.

And the good news which the church brings to Earth Day is that we are not alone. Even when we feel most powerless in the face of environmental problems, even when it is not at all clear how we can address the magnitude of them, even when the systems that are causing such devastating destruction are so powerful, we are not alone. When the oceans are choked with plastic, we are not alone. When habitat for orangutans is being converted to palm oil plantations, we are not alone. When glaciers are shrinking and ice caps melting, we are not alone. The Good News of Easter is that there is a power of life at work in the world who can bring life out of death, victory out of defeat, and raise up hopes that have been dashed.

That first Easter, Jesus came and asked if there was anything to eat, and having eaten a piece of fish, he empowered his disciples, and sent them forth to share that good news, and to change the world. Much of the life of the early church was pretty ordinary. They ate together and worked together. Sometimes they got along famously and sometimes they fought like cats and dogs. They believed that they were the risen body of Christ, and yet they were also a very fallible, very human, very ordinary group of people. They had their conflicts and their struggles and at times it must have seemed that what they were doing was not very important. But it was. Before Jesus, when people got sick, it was assumed that the gods had abandoned them, so their families and friends would abandon them too. But the good news of God's love led to healing ministries which cared for the sick. Before Jesus, the poor were nobodies. Only the rich were considered important. But the good news of God's love held up a very different standard. God's love was for everyone, rich and poor, young and old, slave and free, female and male. Before Jesus, the world was divided into us and them, Jew and Greek, Roman and

Barbarian, and the sacred duty of the civilized was to kill the barbarians. But the good news of God's love taught that everyone was created in God's image, everyone was worthy of God's love and everyone was entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. The church may not have understood just how important their message was, and yet, one by one, day by day, within a couple of hundred years, they had spread the good news of God's love all over the known world, from India and China in the East to Ireland in the west, from Egypt and North Africa in the South to Northern Europe. And everywhere that good news went, it changed the way people understand health and illness, poverty and wealth, social and racial distinctions. They changed the world, those early disciples. Maybe not as much as we would have liked; they left a little something for us to finish up!

Today, in the same way, Jesus shares our ordinary life, in all its conflicted and bewildering complexity. I wrestled this week with what I should say on this Earth Day, because we are facing some pretty major controversies that could easily use some unpacking. What should I say, for example, about the Kinder Morgan pipeline, that would address in any meaningful way the struggle between Alberta's economic interests and the First Nations and environmentalists in B.C. that worry deeply about the impact of that pipeline on their water and ecosystems? I am sympathetic to both. I know how hard the economic downturn has been on many families in this province, including my own. But I also remember the impact that a small oil spill had on the shoreline of my family cabin at Lake Wabamun a few years ago. It cost millions of dollars and months of effort to clean up, and even with all that effort it wasn't completely cleaned up. And I am committed to full and fair consultation with First Nations about development on their traditional lands.

But perhaps most important, I have investigated the science about climate change enough to be deeply concerned that we are not moving fast enough to cut our use of fossil fuels and prevent catastrophic climate change. The economic costs alone of catastrophic climate change dwarf the impact of a pipeline. And beyond the immediate economic costs, there are the dangers of collapsing ecosystems, galloping extinction rates, collapsing food production, starvation, failing states, social unrest and civilizational collapse. We absolutely cannot let that happen. But how do we avoid catastrophic climate change? And what impact might a pipeline have on it? Those are questions which we can debate and will likely disagree about. But I am increasingly convinced that it will take a civilization-wide effort to address the dangers of climate change adequately. All our best efforts: intellectual, economic, political, artistic and creative must be brought to bear to make the changes that need to be made. The task is monumental and intimidating.

But we are not alone. That is the good news. We worship a God who brings life out of death and challenges the powerful forces of death. We worship a God who cares about the ordinary stuff of our lives: about what's in the fridge and what powers the fridge, and about each hair on our heads and each bird that flies. We worship a surprising God whose foolishness is wiser than human wisdom and whose weakness is stronger than human strength.

Last week, we celebrated baptism, and it was one that I will never forget. Those of you who were here won't likely forget it either, and those of you who weren't might have heard what happened because people have been talking about it ever since. We baptized two babies and a toddler. The babies were awake, but content. No crying they made. The toddler, Sawyer Dubois, stole the show. She was not at all shy about being held by me or being watched by all of you. And she was interested in what was happening, interested enough that when I picked her up and started reaching for the water, she reached for the water too. And when I started pouring water over her head, she started doing it too. She was not going to just be baptized. She was going to be involved. It may have been the cutest thing I have ever seen. But it was more than cute. It was hopeful. Because she was not going to be a passive recipient in her baptism. She was not going to be a passive observer in what God was doing in her life.



Later in this service, we will make an offering. Some of you might think the offering is just what we do to pay the bills and are a big contrast with the “spiritual” parts of the service: the scriptures, sermon and the music. It might seem like we crash down to materialistic earth from the uplifting spiritual heights. But I don't see it that way. For me the offering is when Jesus comes into our midst and says, “Do you have anything to eat?” And we share what we have. The offering is where we decide not to be passive recipients in what God is doing in our world. The offering is where the rubber hits the road. The offering is where we commit to be Christian community in our time and place. The offering is how we, in our ordinary lives, live out the call of Christ to be his hands and feet, his agents to change the world. That is an enormous responsibility. Using our ordinary, hungry, squalling communities to change the world seems as impossible as resurrecting a crucified peasant. We can't do it on our own, but we are not alone. We live in God's world. Thanks be to God! Amen!