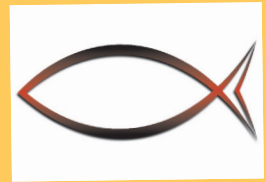




The Line

Convocation of the West

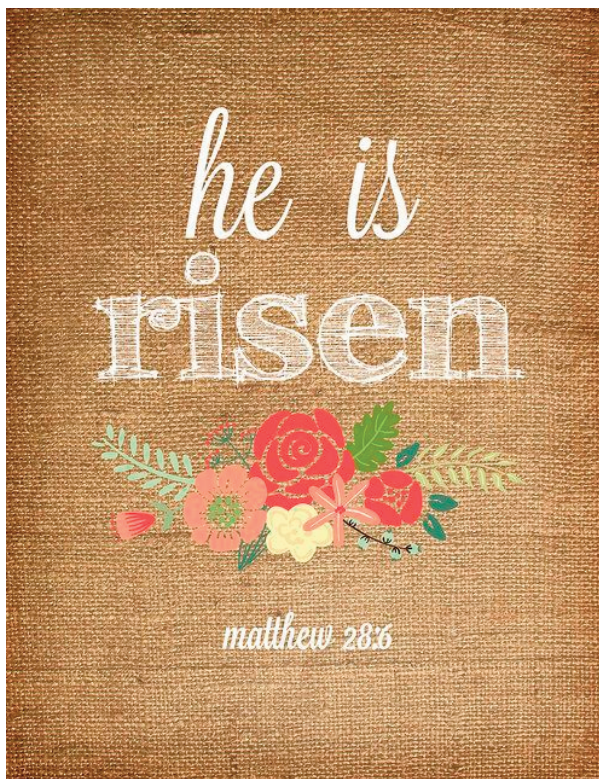


May 2017 Volume IV Number 3

Vicar-General Rev. Michael Penfield: mapenfield@earthlink.net
 Editor: Susan Peterson: smprpp@sbcglobal.net

Hello Brothers and Sisters

As we look around us, amid the hate and turmoil that seems to be visible in every corner of our world, we find our strength this Easter season. We are reminded of the very basis of our faith and hope in this uncertain world we live in.



The Vicar's Venue

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

With this refrain, we announce to the whole world one of the most important beliefs held by all orthodox Christians. This is also what makes the season from Easter through the Ascension to Pentecost one of the most important seasons for Christians. In fact, in the early church, Easter and Pentecost were the two most important Holy days. The Epiphany was third. Christmas was a distant fourth. How much has the Church changed!

But regardless of the relative importance of each Holy day, we are now in a very joyous and important time. When Christ rose from the grave, his disciples really didn't understand what happened. They were frightened and confused. Add to this the fact that, when Jesus started to appear to people, He hid His appearance. His disciples really did not recognize Him. With this in mind, we can fully understand why the Apostles and disciples reacted the way they did in each of these situations.



The Vicar's Venue (continued)

I think there are times, especially when we are young, that we may tell ourselves we would never act like Peter who denied Christ three times, or Thomas who doubted, or the two on the road to Emmaus who did not recognize Christ until He broke bread. But, with age comes wisdom and, more importantly, experience. Once we catch ourselves denying, failing, sinning, doubting, or not recognizing, we begin to understand how others can do the same. Suffice it to say that the Apostles and disciples were a human lot – and thank God! Can you see trying to be perfect? Trust me, it is not possible.

But there was another factor that helped to confuse, helped to create fear, and helped to make the Apostles and disciples somewhat impotent during this period of time. It stems from a request that Jesus, Himself, made to them all. He asked them to tarry in the city of Jerusalem for a little while (Luke 24:49). Jesus wanted them to stay so that they would receive the Holy Spirit. But these were frightened individuals. Even though they saw that Jesus had been raised from the grave, the true impact of this had not been fully understood by His disciples. They probably were ready to flee. However, they had to wait instead.

And then, on Pentecost, the Apostles and disciples finally understood. They received the Holy Ghost who gave them understanding, and strength, and joy. And, just like St. Paul would have happen to him, the figurative scales fell from their eyes, and they were able to fully behold Christ.

There are many important points we can embrace from what happened to the Apostles and disciples. The first is that we do not necessarily have to understand everything always. Sometimes things need to be revealed over time. And this is the point of faith. It is the ability to believe that which is unknown or unseen. And we can feel confident in this because our God is a truthful God. Everything He has told us has come true. Everything He said He would do, He did do. And so, if there is something that is unfulfilled, we can have confidence that God will fulfill it in His good time.

We must also be open to the mysteries of God – His real presence in Holy Eucharist, for example. And we must be open to the miraculous. Miracles are the unexplainable events in our lives. Both mysteries and miracles provide windows to the sacred. And we must be open to them both.

The second is that doubt is NOT the opposite of faith. This is something a very wise minister said to a priest friend of mine who lost a dear friend tragically when they were quite young. Doubting things means that you are not sure, that you may need help to understand. But that does not mean that faith is gone. The Apostles doubted, and it was not just Thomas. They all doubted. They doubted over and over again. However, they did not shut down. They did not decide NOT to be open to the truth. And that openness helped them deal and work through their doubts.





The Vicar's Venue (continued)

The third thing is that we must allow ourselves to be surprised. Often, we want to be in control. We plan; we organize; and we control. But this eliminates the chance for surprise. We need to give people a chance to surprise us – to show us how much they care for us, and how much they love us. If we do not allow for the spontaneous, if we do not allow for others to surprise us, we will eliminate one of the greatest joys in life.

God often surprises. He is subtle, and He is understated. We must be observant, but we must also allow the Lord to surprise us – not only by what may happen to us, but also what He may want us to do.

The Easter season makes it clear; when we least expect it, Jesus may be in our midst. He may be with us when we are with strangers, or while we are alone. And He may reveal Himself to us when we least expect it – like in the breaking of bread. If we will not allow ourselves to be surprised, we may miss Christ in our midst.

Finally, we must learn how to wait. For Americans, this may be the hardest lesson to learn. We are “can-do” people. We do not want to wait. We want to solve. We want the quick fix – just add water. But life and certainly faith rarely is subject to the constraints of a clock. Patience is a virtue; and we are told time and time again that we are to wait on the Lord.

Just think if Peter, who was rather impetuous, said to the others, “Forget it. I am not waiting. Let’s go back to Galilee and wait for the Comforter there.” Our history may have been

different. There was a reason why Jesus wanted His disciples and His mother to wait in Jerusalem until Pentecost, and it becomes obvious when we read the lessons for Pentecost:

“And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.” (Acts 2:5)

God needed the Word to reach all nations “under heaven” and Pentecost was the perfect time for this. He needed the disciples to receive the Holy Spirit at this time so that the maximum number of people would hear and believe. And it happened. About 3,000 people came to the Lord on this first Whitsunday (Acts 2:41).

When Bishop Scarlett spoke to us at our Clericus, he referenced this waiting time, a time of prayer, as an example of what each church needs to do if they hope to grow and be good evangelists. Waiting on the Lord and prayer are powerful tools for any Christian no matter for what he may be waiting.

Easter to Pentecost is our time of great joy. We are to celebrate. We are to show our great love, one for another. And we are to show how deep our faith in these events truly is. But it is also a time for us to grow in our Christianity. We should allow for the mystery of God, for the miracles of God, and for the sacred to work on and in us. We must also forgive ourselves our doubts, and use them to gain a greater understanding of our faith. Further, we need to provide space in our lives for the unexpected – the divine surprises that God so often gives us. And we must learn to be able to wait and





The Vicar's Venue (continued)

pray. If we do all these things, not only will we have a joyous Easter season, we will also grow in our Christianity.

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Amen.

The Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

Vicar-General of the ACW



Parish News

The Old Testament Prophets

(The fourth in a series of short articles on the prophets)

Many Christians concentrate on reading the “major” prophets, as they more clearly illuminate the coming of the Messiah and the End Times, but the minor prophets deserve as much attention.

The books of Zephaniah, Malachi, Hosea, and Habakkuk are little jewels. The first, Zephaniah, born in the reign of Manasseh, focuses on the Day of the Lord. He describes the End Times, when the people will again be gathered in the land and return to the use of pure Hebrew (Zephaniah 3:9).

Zephaniah also hints at a rapture event (Zephaniah 2:3) and notes the nation of Ethiopia

will bring a special gift to the Messiah in Zion in the end time (Zephaniah 3:10). This last point is particularly fascinating, as it is in Ethiopia that the Ark of the Covenant is rumored to rest today. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church claims to possess the Ark under guard in Axum, a city in northern Ethiopia. It would be a suitable gift for the Messiah!

The writings of Malachi includes an interesting challenge. Recall that the books of Moses warn God is not to be tested (Deuteronomy 6:16) and Jesus emphasized several times that we are not to test God (Matthew 4:7, Luke 4:12). Take time to read it. It seemingly even offers an answer to all financial problems if we take advantage of His promise. Malachi ends his writing with a prophecy concerning a return “in the spirit of Elijah.” It can be seen as a promise of the return of a messiah, a concept unknown within Judaism.

Through Hosea, God condemns the people of Israel for their “lack of understanding,” that is, their failure to know and adhere to His will (Hosea 4 6-7, 14). Hosea was a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah and Amos. His principal audience lived in the north, yet he spoke to all the people. He wrote one of the most remarkable books of the Old Testament. No other messenger gives so complete an outline of the way God deals with His earthly people. He reveals to us that: (1) God suffers when His people are unfaithful to Him; (2) God cannot condone sin; (3) God will never cease to love His own; and (4) God seeks to win back those who forsake Him. Hosea’s writing also makes it clear that





Parish News (continued)

material prosperity is not a guarantee of safety in the world. It is a message for all generations.

Among the provocative insights in the gospel of Matthew is his application of Hosea 11:1 as a link between God's fatherhood of Israel "my son" and the later calling of His own Son out of Egypt (Matthew 2:15). It is a fine example of the many double references found in prophecy (both denotative and connotative) and how the deeper meaning of some verses is concealed in the Old Testament and revealed in the New (Mark 4:22).

In Habakkuk we find, "The just shall live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). Paul's epistles, echoing Habakkuk, are often credited with motivating Martin Luther to expound his position on the issue of justification by faith. Here we have the seed of the Reformation in Hebrew Scripture. Habakkuk's comments on faith might have been a partial motivation for Paul's epistles where he considers: "How shall we live?" (Romans 1:17). The answer is, "by faith" (Galatians 3:11). The author of the Book of Hebrews (thought to be Paul) quotes Habakkuk 2:4 when making the point that the righteous live by faith (Hebrews 10:38).

David Cole, St John's Anglican Church, Boerne, TX



The Lions Will Eat Straw

Can my cat go to heaven even though he won't repent? The interaction of humans and animals, especially the ones who can tolerate being close to us, has led many to ask recently if other creatures have souls and will enter heaven. Several well known evangelists and preachers have answered along the lines that, since God wants you to be happy in heaven, surely he will permit you to bring your beloved pet.

Traditional western theology is less accommodating. Roman Catholic theology states that animals do not have souls, so heaven is irrelevant. Much Protestant theology follows the same thought. This view says that animals are qualitatively different from humans. They do not have moral or reasoning ability, only instinct. Domestic animals exist to serve man in various capacities, wild animals to be hunted, trapped, "harvested" or fished for human needs. The dominion granted to man in creation is a license to utilize in whatever way helps us. Creatures do not have an independent reason for existence. Even the answer above, that God will let you bring your pet, fits in this category. Animals exist in a totally anthropocentric context, even when they must suffer and die as a result.

None of this reflects the view of earlier Christianity. It derives from the basic theology of creation. God's plan is not anthropocentric. Rather, all the pieces of creation fit together to make the whole a functioning paradise. The earth is the Lord's, not ours, and all creatures, including us, exist to serve him. Each species has its own purpose and abilities. We are very limited as creatures. Others swim, run, fly, or burrow





Parish News (continued)

better than we do without our recent devices. And just as all humans are given a unique vocation to fulfill, so are all other creatures. Both science and the first chapter of Genesis assert that other animals preceded us into being, and got by without us, perhaps for a very long time.

Our unique nature comes from our creation in the image of God, and our God-given skill and responsibility to manage the earth. Since intelligence and reason seems to be bestowed targeted to what each creature is intended to cope with, it is not a matter of being smarter than others. Many creatures are smarter than we are at certain functions. But we appear to be unique in our ability to plan and organize creation and to think globally, as God does. We can link the entire planet and have sophisticated systems for many things, especially mass communication, consistent with our vocation as managers for the earth.

The human failure to respond to God by living in the paradise he provided, enjoying and returning his love, and managing his planet according to his will, has tragic consequences for everybody and everything, not just for humans. Precisely because we are the key to the earth's proper management, our rebellion has made a mess of the whole order of creation. Other creatures are, to use the current term, collateral damage. We can see this in Isaiah's description of paradise restored, reflecting the paradise lost, as he prophesies the arrival of the "shoot from the stump of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:6-9); The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion

and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The suckling child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain."

Again, in chapter 65, as he pictures the new heaven and new earth, "the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (vs. 25). The latter is a reading in Bright Week. In the western shift of emphasis to the crucifixion being a juridical payment of the penalty for sin, this makes no sense. But in the integrated theology of an earlier time (and in the East), it fits perfectly. The crucifixion and resurrection are the loving remedies needed to restore creation to its original plan. Resurrection is the center of all history because it makes the massive, although gradual, course correction returning the Lord's earth to the Lord's will.

This can jolt the sensibilities of those who have been taught that the purpose is to "save souls" otherwise doomed in a failed and evil earth. Especially American Christianity can be incredibly anthropocentric. It is all about us. We expect creation to operate solely for our benefit, to exploit it mercilessly to our profit and beyond our need. Is this not idolatry, perverting the praise intended for the Creator to a worship of our own egos?

In fact, the course of the earth is set to become again the paradise of harmony and peace



Parish News (continued)

originally intended. As such, Holy Week and Pascha cannot be separated from creation. The former is the restoration of the latter.

It is this totality of God's creation which is on its way to the existence described by St. John in Revelation. He describes a very wounded and damaged planet. Bishop John notes the vast destruction of an earth two-thirds burned by fire, along with other monumental catastrophes. We are just beginning to grasp the sinful role of humans in this, as it impacts the natural world. Those who see Revelation as simply a prediction of future shock miss the point. What John sees is a vision of what is eternally contemporary. The destruction as well as the glory has no time line, just as God is beyond time and lives always in the present tense, which for him includes the past and the future.

The restored creation, towards which we are pilgrims, is an entire earth, not human souls grabbed from a sinking space ship. After all, the humans are the biggest problem. It makes more sense to grab an endangered planet from sinful mankind than the other way around.

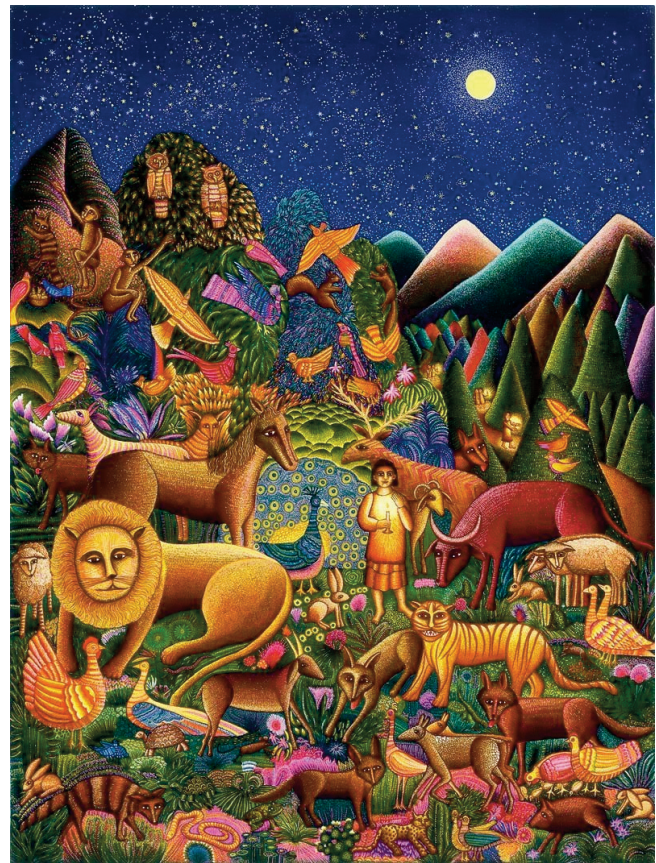
But God, in his love, rescues all who will be rescued. And any reading of Revelation will quickly show it includes a variety of other creatures. They don't seem like Fido and Kitty from the description. But then, you may not look like you did in your high school graduation photo, either (in fact, you already may not).

What is worth remembering is that what is going

on in the massive restoration of a planet which has been in charge of some bad dudes for too long. Once you realize what we are caught up in, you will be as awestruck as John was.

And once the love hits you, you will understand Richard Hooker: "In the mind of a faithful communicant, there is no thought other than 'My God, thou art true, my soul, thou art happy.'" It isn't a question as to whether or not God will indulge you with a pet-friendly heaven. It is that you and your cat are caught up in the vast restoration project of a God whose love never gives up and never ends.

The Right Reverend Winfield Mott





Prayer Requests

Pray for peace and unity in our country, and the rest of the world.

Pray for Christians being persecuted for their religious beliefs.

Pray for those confined to hospitals and nursing homes and those caring for them.

Pray for the Bishops and leaders of Christ's Church.



Hint of Humor

Parting Words

