

John 20: 19-31  
Creekside COB  
April 19, 2009

### **“The Seeker and the Sought”**

**According to the calendar, Easter was last Sunday. According to the internal calendar, it seems like Easter was in February. I think I know why. Lots of planning and practice goes into Holy Week that begins with waving palms and reading psalms, washing feet, the bread and cup, and listening to Jesus’ last words as the last candle in the Tenebrae service is extinguished and we sit in the silent dark. Come Sunday, we peek inside the vacant tomb, sing, “Christ the Lord is risen today,” and leave with “alleluias” ringing in our ears.**

**It isn’t long, however until the ringing is replaced by the inevitable Easter let down. We get to the car and our thoughts turn to the ham in the oven and the guests coming to Easter dinner. The final round of the Master’s will be on. The taxes aren’t done yet. The deadline is Wednesday. It makes Easter seem longer than a week ago.**

**We don’t want to admit that Easter isn’t integrated into our lives, or that we don’t give resurrection much thought until next Easter. The poet, Wendell Berry wrote a poem called, *“Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front.”* He cautions against the love of the quick profit, the annual raise, the fear of knowing your neighbors and death, while extolling the necessity of *“doing things that won’t compute”*:**

**When they want you to buy something  
they will call you. When they want you  
to die for profit they will let you know.**

*So, friends, every day do something  
that won't compute.*

Love the Lord.  
Love the world. Work for nothing.  
Take all that you have and be poor.  
Love someone who does not deserve it.

Ask the questions that have no answers.  
Invest in the millenium. Plant sequoias.  
Say that your main crop is the forest  
that you did not plant,  
that you will not live to harvest...

Be like the fox  
who makes more tracks than necessary,  
some in the wrong direction.  
*Practice resurrection.*

"Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front" from *The Country of Marriage*, 1973.

**On the evening of the first day of the week -- resurrection day -- the disciples weren't practicing resurrection. They weren't drawing up a strategic plan for their apostolic mission. They weren't applying for "not-for-profit" status for their little corporation. They were too wrapped up in fear for that. Their major accomplishment was finding a hideout. Early that morning, the women told the disciples they had seen Jesus, very much alive and well. The men weren't convinced.**

**Consider the disciples' fear. Why hide behind a barricaded, double-bolted door? The text says it was "for fear of the Jews," yet there is no historical evidence to suggest there was a bounty on the disciple's heads by either Jewish or Roman authorities. Fear didn't keep Peter and the other disciple from running to the tomb to check things out for themselves. Thomas apparently wasn't afraid to be seen in public because he wasn't with the other disciples.**

**Why were they afraid? Imagine sitting unseen in a corner of their hideout. Listen to their shock over what happened. How could Jesus promise so much and commanded such power, and in the end die like a crook on a cross? Why did Jesus stir their highest hopes and then desert them in death? Listen to them confess what abject failures they were -- betraying, denying, and running scared when Jesus needed them most. A part of them that hoped Jesus *wasn't alive*.**

**I was in a golf tournament at the Black Squirrel Course. Our foursome stepped into the tee box and saw a man and a boy who weren't in the tournament enter our fairway and begin playing the hole. My friend Mark teed up his ball to drive. I told him to wait because they weren't out of range. "*I won't hit it that far,*" he said. He hit his best drive of the day. The ball sailed over their heads and landed thirty feet in front of them. Plop!**

**Assuming he was an intentional target, the man dropped his clubs and came charging toward us. As he drew close, I noticed his bright red complexion and heard a string of angry expletives. He singled me out, got in my face and said, "You messed with the wrong guy. I'm a member of this club and I'll see to it that your #@#!\*+## won't get on this course again!" I replied, "Sir, you're addressing the wrong guy." I turned, and Mark wasn't there. No one was with me. Mark stealthfully snuck back to the cart path, and tried to look *inconspicuous* behind a group of players that gathered to watch the spectacle. Once the smoke cleared, I turned to Mark and thanked him for allowing me the honor of thinking the wrath that had his name on it.**

**Guilt over their desertion made Jesus the last person the disciples wanted to see. But come evening they had no choice. Without the courtesy of knocking, Jesus stood before the disciples. They fell to the floor and braced themselves to take their medicine. "Some rock you turned out to be, Peter. As for the rest of you, I didn't know you could run so fast!" You couldn't blame Jesus for saying it. Under the circumstances he was justified.**

**Borrowing Wendell Berry's words, Jesus did something "that didn't compute." He gave the disciples a resurrection experience to practice with. He didn't ask, "How could you?" He said, "Peace be with you." They didn't get the dickens; they got peace, which was what they needed most. Peace is what Jesus was the Prince of. It was his to give. They were paralyzed by fear, until Jesus' mercy and forgiveness and peace was granted to them.**

**This scene is the gospel of John's version of Pentecost. The disciples were assembled in one place when Jesus, who was supposed to be dead, appeared to them. He gave a double-dose of "Peace be with you," then he breathed upon them the breath of life to restore their spent, dispirited lives.**

**This wonderful story has something to say when we see who takes the initiative. Check out who is going where. The women went to the tomb to prepare Jesus' body for a descent burial, not have a conversation with him. The disciples didn't camp out at the tomb waiting for their Lord to wake from the dead. They didn't ask Pilate of Caiaphas if they had seen Jesus hanging around anywhere. They didn't look for him, but Jesus looked for them.**

**In Jesus' parables of the lost, the shepherd didn't sit on a stump waiting for his lost sheep to find it's way back. He scoured every thicket and ravine until he found the poor thing. The prodigal father didn't wash he hands clean of his wayward son. None of that, He-made-his-own-bed-let-him-lay-in-it" stuff. He scanned the horizon everyday, praying that he could restore his lost son to the family.**

**Someone said, "You go get scientific knowledge, while religious knowledge comes to you." In the same way, we get experience, but wisdom comes to us. We get knowledge, but insight comes to us.**

**I get tired of hearing about *seeker* churches. Don't get me wrong. I'm all for churches that make christianity accessible and relevant to people who know nothing about church. They help**

people who are after meaning and purpose in life. We *all* should seek the God-given purposes for which we were made. But the seeker model is backwards. If God had said, “My love is dependent upon you making the first move,” -- if the spread of Christianity was dependent upon our taking the initiative in finding God, finding ourselves and finding our way, Christianity wouldn’t have survived the first century.

Let’s get our directions straight. What Jesus did before the resurrection he did after the resurrection. He searched for us.

Anne Lamott is a writer who had made a mess of her life and experienced an *earthy introduction* to Jesus. In her book, *Plan B*, she describes how God comes to her in ways she cannot anticipate. She says, ...One of the top five most annoying things about God is that He or She rarely answers right away. Some people seem to understand this -- that life and change take time.

One day I prayed, “Help me,” and then I drove to the market in silence, to buy my birthday dinner... When the checker finished ringing up my items, she looked at my receipt and cried, “Hey! You’ve won a ham!” I felt blind-sided by the news. I had asked for help, not a ham. This was very disturbing. What on earth was I going to do with ten pounds of salty pink eraser? I rarely eat it. It makes you bloat. “Wow,” I said. The checker was so excited about giving it to me that I pretended I was, too.

A bagger was dispatched to fetch my ham. I stood waiting anxiously. I wanted to go home so I could start caring for suffering people on CNN. I almost suggested that the checker award the ham to the next family who paid with food stamps. But for some reason I waited. If God was giving me a ham I’d be crazy not to receive it. Maybe it was the ham of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

We aren’t the seekers. God is. God loved us before we loved him. Thomas wasn’t around for Jesus’ first visit. A week later Jesus returned, but not for Thomas’ benefit alone. The disciples were in the same house. The doors were still shut. The implications of the resurrection haven’t yet sunk in. Just as they

didn't get it before the resurrection, and they still don't get it afterwards.

The Anglican Bishop and bible scholar, N. T. Wright makes an interesting observation about the gospel stories of the resurrection. There isn't a connection between Jesus' resurrection and the future hope of our own. In each gospel, Jesus' emphasis is upon what the resurrection means here and now. They don't say, "Christ is risen, and one day so will you." It says, "Christ is risen, now go tell the world about it! Christ is risen, now show the world who is in charge. Christ is risen, so he's not leaving us to ourselves. He has work for us to do.

Francis Thompson was a nineteenth century poet. He dropped out of medical school, became an opium addict, and for years lived a destitute life. Yet Francis Thompson created what many consider to be the most moving piece of religious poetry ever written. "*The Hound of Heaven*," is Thompson's spiritual journey written from the perspective of a man being hunted like a dog by God.

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.  
Up vistaed hopes I sped;  
And shot, precipitated,  
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,  
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.

But with unhurrying chase,  
And unperturbèd pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
They beat -- and a voice beat  
More instant than the Feet --  
"All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."

**God is the seeker. We are the sought. Jesus is the Master. We are his disciples. God is persistent. God keeps coming – “with unhurrying chase and unperturbed pace.” He keeps calling us out -- out of our shells, out of our troubles, out of our perplexity and confusion, out of our fears of life and death, lovingly, persistently God hounds us, and seeks us no matter what, following us with goodness and mercy all the days of our lives and beyond.**