

Easter Sunday, April 8, 2007

John 19:16-18, 25-30

Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.

Standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Sermon: Drink from the Water of Life

Today we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus who was crucified. For almost two thousand years gatherings like this have heard the gospel proclamation
When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."

Why would this event connected with this single person be so important to so many people from generation to generation. What does it offer? What does it mean?

To answer that question I would like to look at several passages of scripture -- beginning at the end -- with the book of Revelation. It's the same passage we used this morning for our call to worship:

"It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

That passage is the theme of this sermon: To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

The Jews were a people whose psychology was shaped by the dry winds and harsh conditions of the desert. And what craving do you think could be more powerful to a desert people than the craving of thirst? Isaiah said:
When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, the Lord will answer them.

And the psalmist prays:
As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

Jesus knew about being thirsty. One time he was traveling the dusty roads of the countryside between Judea and Galilee and came to an ancient well, the well Jacob gave to his son Joseph. A Samaritan woman came with her bucket and Jesus asks her for a drink.

This request went against every social convention of the day – a man speaking to a woman he did not know, a Jew asking a Samaritan. And so she says: How is it that you ask a drink of me? And Jesus answers her:
“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” “...those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty; (it) will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”

To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

Jesus knew about being thirsty. Remember John’s telling of Jesus’ last words from the cross:
After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

The thirst for water can be a powerful craving for the human body – the thirst for drink can be a powerful addiction for the troubled mind. But what is the thirst that cries out from the heart and soul, what is the thirst that requires the living water of salvation to satiate and satisfy?

We learn about this water in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And if our eyes are open, we see this thirst every day in the world around us.

I saw a taste of that thirst demonstrated in a most vivid way on television last week. I don’t know how many of you saw the same video clip, but it was on many of the news

shows and later posted all over the internet. The scene was a homecoming, a reunion between a father and a son.

The summary caption reads: Sailor Surprises Son; Reunion Is Unforgettable A tearful John Hawes runs into his father's arms

A kindergartner in Washington State got the surprise of his little life this morning. His father, who's been serving in Iraq for the past seven months, paid an unannounced visit to his class. And the reunion was unforgettable. When Ensign Bill Hawes walked into his son John's classroom, little John had a look of shock on his face, immediately followed by flowing tears. John then ran into his dad's arms for the hug he had been waiting so long for.

It was that simple, pure, and powerful. The little boy who held nothing back absolutely jumped into his father's arms and wouldn't let go. The tears on his face expressed all the joy and relief that he felt at his father's return. His father's absence had created a thirst as deep as an ocean in this youngster's soul, and their reunion brought forth tears of joy and overwhelming relief.

The Gospel sees the love of God revealed in the ordinary events of every day life; the holy made visible in the love we know and so deeply desire.

Jesus spoke of a similar purity of power in the parable of the prodigal son – only in that case it was the father who was waiting for his son to return from danger. Jesus says: But while the son was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. And the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!'

That reunion, that return, that finding of all that was lost is what makes the Gospel so thirst-quenching when one trusts in God and believes in the power of the resurrection.

Are you thirsty? Do you long to know a love stronger even than death? Do you crave the hope of a reunion where all that has been scattered and lost is finally gathered in? Are you thirsty?

Then you have come to the right place. And on the right day. For today we hear the words of the one who goes ahead of us and calls us to follow into God's new heaven and new earth with faith – the one who says:

"It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.