

“GROUNDED: FINDING GOD IN THE WORLD”

[NOTE – This sermon series is based on the book of the same title by Diana Butler Bass. I have used Diana’s words, adapted and verbatim, throughout the sermon, mixing them with my own reflections and illustrations. I have bolded the words that come directly from the book.]

EASTER SUNDAY
“Revelation: Jesus Lives”
by
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Texts: Luke 24:1-12
4/14/19

Preached:

Revelation 21:1-5

The women came to the tomb early that first Easter morning. They were followers of Jesus...they never unfollowed. They were with him that last week of his Passion and they watched him take his last breath on the cross. Now, they brought their spices to attend to the death. This was not new to them. They had done this before, for relatives, neighbors, other friends. Each time they would return to the tomb to prepare the body. Now they would do it for Jesus.

They would anoint the body of the one whom they had hoped would bring new life to a desperate world. When Jesus of Nazareth had been with them, they felt like anything was possible. They had seen people healed from disease, had seen demons cast out with a word, and had even seen the dead brought back to life.

They had heard him talk about the kingdom of God, which sounded to them like a whole new world, sustaining a different kind of life than the one they were used to -- a world where the first become last and the last first; a world where violence and pain are no more; a world where the brokenness and sins of the past are forgiven; and where everything is made new. But this was not some distant world; in fact, Jesus insisted this world was already here and breaking in among them in his own life and ministry.

But that world, that dream was shattered when Jesus’ life was cut short. And now the familiar burial work of the old world needed to be done. They found the tomb unsealed, but when they proceeded into that dark place, there was no lifeless body, no body at all. Then, suddenly, there were two bodies, two men, full of life, dressed in dazzling apparel.

The women expected to find what they always found when doing their solemn work at the tombs. They imagined nothing new this time. Instead, terrified, they were questioned by these two strange men... “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” He is not

here, but has risen." Prompted by the men, the women were helped to recall Jesus' words, his description of what would happen to him...the Son of Man...handed over...crucified...and on the third day rise again. Once this dawned on them, they left the tomb, to tell the other disciples, the eleven and all the rest. They had to share the Good News!

But the others had a hard time believing...as we do. Could the promise of real, abundant, eternal life, for us and for the world be real? It seems other-worldly...but it's not.

The kingdom of God is not a distant world but the reality of what happens when heaven and earth come together, renewing both -- the reality we pray for in the Lord's Prayer.

All this Lenten season we have been considering what it means to be grounded...what it means to find God and know God, the Ground of all being. Inspired by Author Diana Butler Bass, we have imagined God revealing God's self in the things we know – through creation and community. When we consciously attend to nature and to our relationships we come to understand that God **has become unmediated and local, animating the natural world and human activity in profoundly intimate ways.**

I count one of my spiritual mentors the late Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. I never met him, but I love his simple, gentle, wise writing. Thomas Merton called him a soul mate.

Thich Nhat Hanh understood something of being grounded. He wrote: *I like to walk alone on country paths, rice plants and wild grasses on both sides, putting each foot down on the earth in mindfulness, knowing that I walk on the wondrous earth. In such moments, existence is a miraculous and mysterious reality. People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child -- our own two eyes. All is a miracle.*

The Apostle Paul (in 1 Corinthians 15) describes Jesus' resurrection as the "first fruits" (we might say "prototype") of what will happen to us in God's future -- renewed people in a renewed heaven and earth where God dwells with us and makes us whole. We don't have to wait for real life in some distant heaven...because it's coming here and, indeed, is here and available for us right now. The One who was dead is now alive, and, because he lives, we have the light of life that illumines everything and makes all things new!

"See, I am making all things new," Jesus says in the Book of Revelation. It's the same thing God started off saying...back in the very beginning. Our invitation, our Easter

challenge this day, is to hear it, see it, believe it...all things new. What is God doing in your life? ...in the life of the world? What do you see?

Both Genesis and Revelation are creation stories. But they are not stories of static creation, where God makes the world, gives it to us to have dominion over, and then goes away. Instead, they invite us to make the world *with* God. Genesis invites us into a world of agrarian creativity – to plant, produce and procreate.

Revelation invites us into a world of urban creativity – to be people who live by God’s light, continue to bring forth fruit, and govern with God forever. From beginning to end, the biblical story is one in which we make a peaceable world with God. We are invited to partner with God...seeing, and making all things new.

If we understand that we are dirt, that God is the ground of all that is, well, then, we might think twice about how we treat soil.

If water is the river of spiritual and physical life, we will care about what we are doing to watersheds.

If air sustains us and we are made of stardust, then the sky and what happens to it matters.

Knowing our own roots is the first step in knowing ourselves and recognizing our common humanity.

Making a home is a radical act of claiming a place in the world. Being neighborly is the path to empathy, of enacting the Golden Rule.

Building the commons, the “we” of our world house, is to pull the vision of heaven out of the clouds to earth here and now. We are constantly creating a sacred architecture of dwelling – of God’s dwelling and ours – as we weave nature and the built environment into a web of meaning. Awe and action are of a piece.

We do this. God did not leave humankind a garden and say, “Don’t touch it.” Instead, God asked us to watch over and care for the garden, to “till and keep” the soil. God did not bring down the New Jerusalem and say “show’s over.”

Instead, God welcomes the beloved into a life free from pain, suffering, and oppression and opens the city gates to an unlimited human future. The book of Revelation does not end with God judging a sinful world. It rather ends with an invitation: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’” (Revelation 22:17)

Spirituality is not just about sitting in a room encountering a mystical God in meditation

or about seeing God in a sunset. Awe is the gateway to compassion. It is a deep awareness that we are creators, creators who work with the Creator, in an ongoing project of crafting a world.

If we do not like the world or are afraid of it, we have had a hand in that. And if we made a mess, we can clean it up and do better. We can also work on our relationships – we can love our family members. We can be neighborly. We can practice compassion and hospitality. We can make a difference in our community. We can nurture mental health for the lost and hurting among us. What can you do? How will you claim the Easter promise for yourself?

We can follow God's lead, who says, "See, I am making all things new." --- God is with us. Right here and now.

Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed!