

Easter Day, 2011

Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-18

I suppose you realize that by coming to church today – the day when the church proclaims something unbelievable and mysterious – you’ve made an odd choice, one that is profoundly counter-cultural. This faith, this choice of showing up for the Easter proclamation, is more troublesome than remembering Jesus’ teachings about the spiritual life, his healings, his model of service and radical hospitality at table, even his suffering and death. Last night we stood with his disciples at the edge of not knowing what comes next, choosing to carry a bit of light ourselves into that darkness, watching the flame of new light and life reach the corners of our souls and the corners of the world.

Today the church tells you of the mystery of hiddenness, of unexpected upendings and reversals and says that each one of you carries the hiddenness of reshaping, that who you really are is a mystery held by God. Today you have set a table in the wilderness – linen, flowers, candles, food for your journey. Today your presence says that you affirm that NOT being in charge of your own life is the basic stance for Christians. You listen to texts that surprise and confound and your response is “the traditional Anglican rumble of appreciation for Holy Writ no matter how outrageous the content.”

“For you have died with Christ and your life is hid with Christ in God.” The point is clear – you do not get to shape everything about yourself and you don’t even get to see very clearly what shape your life will ultimately take. Where your life is going, what it finally means is hidden.

“When Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” When Christ who is our TRUE life appears then, and only then, will we appear as we truly are. “There’s a very good chance that you will be very surprised at what your life looks like when it is seen by the light of Christ,” says a professional theologian.

I’m struck by that bold statement. This week as often happens at funerals the one who died was described by family and friends in terms of character and accomplishments. The absence of the person is profound; many folks need to reshape the patterns of every day in a thousand ways. The church, then, in response says that each life has another dimension, a mystery first hidden and then revealed in the light of God’s love. Few who gather are familiar with scripture anymore but they bring poems that speak of hope, of reunion with those they love because all lives are held in God. And they stand with this mystery, the greatest one of all.

A Christian proclamation is always about faith, hope and love. In every variation, in stories shared week by week, the seeds of the hidden work of God are planted. What we do here – over and over again – is steward mystery. We cannot always touch its depths in ourselves or in others. And that is part of the point here –we are invited to watch and wait, to trust and doubt, to run toward and run away from life. We are encouraged to speak and to be silent. Life brings bewilderment, frustration and sometimes fear because we are confronted by mystery.

Some of us like that and some of us don't. Mystery can free us from judgment and quick responses. We stay with the questions, we stay with the angst of not having everything turn out as we had planned. Each of us is to tend the secret of who we really are, the true life, the life which is hidden with Christ in God.

Easter is "the advance course for Christians" - it is the whole point says more than one commentator. We say that the haters and the killers will not have the final word, that violence and suffering will be met by forgiveness and peace, that nothing done while we have lost our way is beyond God's power to redeem, reclaim and reshape.

The mysteries of this Holy Week are many: the art and soul project, the names on the lips of those who ask for compassion, the insights of others, the sitting in the dark, the search for true companions in the walk of faith, the taste of the bitter and the sweet, the quiet statements and questions of children, the generous baking and buying and sharing. Why would anyone not show up for these treasures?

What the letter to the Colossians is talking about is living life as a mystery – and not only occasionally when you're in a slightly loose frame of mind, but rather accepting the fact that that is how life with God really is, always. And mystery is hard to live with, let alone live out. Real mysteries, that is. A true mystery doesn't yield to reason and facts – like the ones at the bookstore or in the library. A real mystery is waiting to be revealed.

Some people think that religion is about answers for everything and I suppose that there are many brands of that – just follow the formula and you will be wealthy, healthy and powerful. You will get to believe your own press, the autobiography of wisdom and wit that makes you smugly superior to others. And it is true that religion has claimed to have all the answers. Living your life as a mystery hidden in God is fairly inefficient, not professional, and terribly unmodern.

And it is deeply, wonderfully faithful. Easter says we all get to discover what God cherishes, how each of us is held in God's heart, how Jesus shows us something about that.

That is so odd, so mysterious. It has to be true.

Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Linda Privitera

Go out into the world in peace.

Have courage. Hold on to what is good.

Return no one evil for evil.

Strengthen the faint-hearted. Support the weak.

Help the suffering. Honor all people.

Love and serve God rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.