

# St James United Church

Message for May 1, 2022

Third Sunday of Easter



“A Resurrected World”

- Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

John 21:1-14; Acts 9:10-20; “Where Does the Temple Begin, Where Does It End?” by Mary Oliver

I'm having an odd Easter season this year. I'm not drawn to the parts of the readings that I usually am. Last week I focused on Jesus telling Thomas to touch his wounds, rather than on Thomas' doubt, and this week the disciples barely register, not even Peter enthusiastically jumping out of the boat. Instead, it is the act of fishing, the huge catch of fish, a bread and fish breakfast that catch my attention. The human aspect is there but not at the centre, part of a bigger narrative that needs to be told. Perhaps it's something in the water.

Or perhaps it's the water itself, or more specifically ready access to views of the ocean, vistas that help me see myself differently, smaller and yet bigger at the same time. The pace of life is more relaxed here and so invites me to slow down, to take in those ocean views, to be more attentive to what is around me and so in the spirit of Mary Oliver to look, and by “Looking I mean not just standing around, but standing around / as though with your arms open”. When I look around in this open-armed way, I find that I am not so centred on myself as usual, that I see the waves, fish, a gull, the rocks, not as objects but subjects, and in their own right rather than in relation to me. They are praising God more authentically than I, and God is with them.

As I consider this, I realize I'm approaching the gospel in the same way. After all what I noticed first is decentred from the human, the divine with the disciples, yes, but not only them. In the story they don't recognize the Risen One in a stranger telling them to cast their net. It isn't until they catch a huge haul of fish, when they see a beach breakfast, that they recognize the Risen Christ. A human centred view would say their retelling stories of Jesus while they fished brought him to them. But what if it was the act of fishing, them present to the moment, looking around as though with arms open that helped them see him? What if the sight of such abundance, the smell of frying fish, the taste of bread helped them experience the presence of the divine in a new way?

Seeing in a new way is key to understanding Acts 9. When Ananias prays over Saul, scales fall from his eyes. Up until his vision of the Risen Christ, Saul was fixed on one way of seeing God, and it didn't include the insight of those who followed Jesus after his death. But then everything changed. What if that's the core of Easter, a shift in how we see ourselves, each other, the world, and how we're part of it as smaller yet bigger, all connected. I wonder if that's why Jesus told his disciples he needed to leave in order for them to do greater things than him? Human-centred, we assume he meant that the church would share his teaching of justice and love far and wide. And it did. Hence Saul sent to Damascus by leaders in Jerusalem still angry at

Jesus' teaching. One teaching was that when they reached out and helped the least of them, they helped Jesus too. We tend to hear it as a call to extend justice and love. But what if he was sharing with them why we are to extend justice and love, not that we'll do greater, but be greater, will be connected, everyone, and everything held in God's grace?

This question is posed by Greek Orthodox theologian John Chryssavgis who observes how we interpret incarnation, expressed in John as "the Word became flesh" to mean "became human". If we consider again that teaching of Jesus, he asks, what if Jesus meant not just the least of humans but the least of everything, fish, gulls, sand on a beach, the tiniest particles a place where we meet the Risen Christ? "Everything is in some way sacramental," he writes, "All depends on the receptiveness and openness of our hearts...Were God not tangibly accessible in the very earthliness of this world,... [God] would not be the loving ...author of the universe." That moves me. God everywhere, experienced when we let go of ourselves, open to the moment, perhaps just fishing, eating a meal, looking at the ocean.

This view is echoed by Celtic peoples. In "The Evernew Tongue", an Irish apocryphal poem about the apostle, Philip it reads: "This is what has driven me to you / To explain the wondrous tale / Which the Holy Spirit declared / ...Of the creation of heaven and earth... / Which was made possible / By Christ's resurrection from the dead." It's odd to say that a moment 2000 years ago makes possible a 13.8-billion-year-old universe, but only because in a human centric way we see not just the incarnation but the resurrection as only about Jesus. But the statement is bigger than that. People say the reason we celebrate Easter each Spring is because this annual rebirth reminds us of the death and resurrection of Christ. But the poem suggests the reverse, the cycle of death and resurrection we see in the seasons is the eternal pattern of God. The leaves that fall each year followed by shoots pushing through them in the mud are as much the Risen Christ as the stranger telling the disciples to cast their net. It's a broader pattern of the divine, forever dying and rising, forever poured out in self-sacrificing love so that life can be born anew. Easter reveals this.

Easter calls us to look around with arms open and when we do we see the resurrection pattern everywhere. It is part of our lives. We celebrate it in a special way in communion. More than a meal in which we remember Jesus' death and resurrection, it's a sacrament that connects us to Christ in each other, but also the bread, and beyond it, the flour, those who milled it, the wheat, the soil, the sun, a bird flying overhead, ever wider connections. We're often inattentive to these but they're present just the same. Christ feeds us so we can embrace this pattern, to die to ourselves and so rise into connection, die to self interest and rise to see Christ around us, changing how we see and treat ourselves, other humans, creatures, the Earth. And in fact every meal can do the same, every experience connecting us to each other, the Earth, to God.

As I shared at the start, this Easter season feels different for me, and that is a good thing. Maybe the scales have finally started to come off of my eyes. What a gift to see the world, each other, differently, to look around as if with arms and hearts and eyes wide open and see a resurrected world. Amen.