

Linens

I'm not sure if you know this, but it's not unusual for some bishops and even quite a few theologians to question the resurrection of Jesus.

Marcus Borg tells us that it doesn't really matter if Jesus was raised or not.

John Dominic Crossan, a former Roman Catholic priest and theologian argues that Jesus's body was simply taken down from the cross and thrown into a pit, where it was likely eaten by dogs.

Once you pick yourself up off the floor after the shock of that claim wears off, (a claim that, as to Jesus, has no basis in history, tradition or theology), one sometimes wonders what is the current state of affairs with our faith?

But as with most things human, if we stick with what we know, we might come closer to the truth.

And one thing we know is human nature.

Which is this: human nature hasn't changed much in the last 2000 years; and probably hasn't changed much in the last 200,000 years.

Left to our own devices, human beings are self-obsessed, self-protective, and self-justifying.

Don't take my word for it, just think about the last person who

got you mad!

Peter is the perfect person to drive this point home.

Just last week, Peter is warming his hands by a charcoal fire outside the high priest's living-room when he's approached by three teenage girls.

Each of them in turn accuse him of following Jesus.

And to each of them, Peter not only denies knowing Jesus, but he swears an oath that he's never met that man in his life!

There's Peter, the human being — left to his own devices.

Self-obsessed, self-protective, and self-justifying.

And here we are only a week later, and that same man, no longer left to his own devices, but having encountered the risen Lord in all of that glorious reality, is now standing up to the same religious leaders who so happily put Jesus to that bloody death on the cross.

Peter tells them in no uncertain terms that Jesus is the Lord, the long-awaited Messiah, the redeemer of heaven and earth.

And he does so fearlessly and faithfully, no matter the consequences.

People then, like people now, know the difference between ghosts and hallucinations; mirages and dreams.

People then, like people now, know that nobody rises from the dead.

And yet people then, like people now, have come to experience One who, in fact, rose from the dead.

And that person has forever changed our lives, so that we are no longer entirely self-obsessed, self-preserving, or self-justifying.

It's now Christ with whom we are obsessed.

It's now Christ who protects us.

It's now Christ who justifies us.

Last week you'll remember one of the details of the empty tomb is that the linen burial clothes were left behind.

Sister Joan Chittister says that those linens symbolize Jesus' earthly ministry.

Those linens were left behind so that the followers of Jesus could put them on and then head to Galilee, where they will continue the ministry by feeding the hungry, healing the sick and speaking truth to power.

Just so, we are invited to put on the linens left behind by Jesus as we too continue his ministry in the world today.

And while we may not go to Galilee, we will certainly go to Kailua!

And there, feed the hungry, bind up the injured, and give to those who are blind to their own human dignity, the insight that they are indeed dearly beloved children of the living God.

Today, more than ever, given the daily atrocities occurring in our own nation, donning the linens of Christ means speaking up and speaking out against the powers that be in this world.

Wearing the linens of Christ means consistently challenging the cultural values of money, power and fame.

It means speaking against efforts to transform the Prince of Peace into a blasphemous idol of warfare.

Wearing the linens of Christ changes us into people who develop the eyes to see the face of God in the most downtrodden, in the most despised.

Changing us into people willing to reject the so called common sense goals of feathering our own nest.

Learning instead to reach out to the least, the lost, and the left behind.

This is precisely the transformation that St Peter undergoes.

His revolutionary change, from wimp to warrior, comes about because he encounters the living God, in Jesus.

He goes on to preach the gospel throughout Europe, ending up in Rome, where he too, is crucified.

But along the way, he creates through the grace of God, a new people.

We stand with these new people:

“a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, to proclaim the virtues of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” 1 Pet 2:9-10.

As we too move from wimps to warriors, as we too put on the linens left behind by Jesus, as we too learn to live life within the flow, we slowly learn to let go of resentment and fear and anger.

We learn to detach.

We learn to trust that all shall be well.

And there is this.

Ask any group of church goers what our destiny is and 9 out of 10 will say we die and go to heaven – or hell.

But our true destiny is not as an immortal soul in heaven.

Our true destiny is as a resurrected body on the new earth!

There's a reason so many opt for the Greek philosophy of Plato instead of the resurrection of Jesus when it comes to our ultimate destiny.

There are lots of reasons why we fall in love with the idea of an immortal soul that heads for heaven while the dead body rots in the grave.

First, it assumes that we have an immortal soul that is independent of our body, perhaps even independent of God, and so we have some kind of right to a next life.

We like rights!

Second, if we can ignore what actually happens in the resurrection of Jesus, of his fusing together of heaven and earth, of his actual, constant, totally real presence here and now, (mostly in the faces of the vulnerable, the outcast), well then, we can get back to a life where God is in heaven, but by golly we run the world!

Which excuses our trillion dollar military budgets.

Which allows the richest one-percenters to kneel in church without a thought for the folks at the bottom.

Which creates the con artist TV evangelists who promise riches to

some of the most vulnerable if only they'll send in their last \$100.

With immortal souls and rotting bodies, we put our money on human rules – with the occasional polite nod to the rules of heaven.

But that is not our faith.

Jesus sets in motion a revolution!

It's the revolution of the Kingdom of God – invading this world!

Like the mustard weed invading the garden.

Like yeast forcing the dough to grow.

The revolution of Jesus means that God's ways are replacing our ways.

That our best thinking is finally exposed for the shallow sham that it is.

That in the resurrection of Jesus, raised into a transformed body from the grave, in him, the sacred and the profane embrace – while heaven and earth, kiss.

It's God's stunning promise that one day we too shall be raised from our graves!

That these bodies are the seeds of something new, something glorious!

And so this Easter season, may we, with St Peter, come to experience the risen Lord!

May we put on the left behind linens and take up Christ's ministry on earth!

May we too move from wimps to warriors – to the greater glory of God!

+amen