

Eucharist Sermon—Kevin Thew Forrester [04.06.08]

Readings: Acts 2:14a, 36-41 1Peter 1:17-23 and Luke 24:13-35

[Introductory remarks omitted]

Good Morning. Luke's gospel is a very symbolic gospel and he is portraying in the story we hear this morning in these final chapters and then are carried forward in Acts, which Luke also wrote, Luke-Acts are one book really—two long chapters. And this is a story this morning, of Eucharist—it's a symbolic story of worship. That's what this is in Luke—and all we are doing this morning we gather together—we come here we gather together and we begin to share our stories—which is what they are doing on the road, aren't they? They are talking—what does this mean to be a follower of this person who was killed? I don't know—what do you think it means? We do that every Sunday. We are doing it right now as I talk with you. We are reflecting on the stories that have reared us and have shaped us. What do they mean? And they travel and we travel our lifetimes together, don't we, reflecting and working on these stories.

And then they sit down and they break bread, and they realize somehow that this one who was dead is alive and is in their midst. Somehow he is alive and the breaking of bread and the feeding of one another and being fed - and then they go on.

We gather, we share our stories, we break our bread , we are fed and we move on and the question Luke then raises for us is this: were not our hearts—were they or were they not burning within us? That's quite a question isn't it - were or were not our hearts burning within us as we gathered?

Now there are a lot of ways our hearts can burn. I have been in a number of gatherings over the last week and months. There are times our hearts can burn with frustration - there are times when our hearts can burn with anger—there are times when our hearts can burn with being obsessed about things and mulling them over. Sometimes our hearts can burn with shame. Our hearts can burn with many things, so it's not just an idle question were not our hearts burning within—are they and what are they burning with? What are we on fire about? Coz we can kill each other with our burning hearts. There are lots of different kinds of passion to be inflamed with.

There is an essential piece, at least for me about Eucharist and about worship, and it is this—for me and for my experience. We come together, through our prayers, through our ritual, through our

hymnody and these pieces weave together to form a very gracious and precious thing. They form here in our midst something that can hold us so that we might, in the words of the Psalmist, be still and know that I am God. In other words, we might learn to be still and know that we are in the presence of God. We might learn to be still and know that God is present in us and **as us**. [There's a little one. You can come in] And it is not an easy thing to be still and be present to God. I would say it's a lifelong journey, to learn to be still in the presence of God. Some of you know, perhaps a number of you know that I have been involved and I—people question me why?--I have been involved in Buddhism for a number of years in my life and I still remain involved with Buddhism. And Buddhism has taught me this, and it continues to teach me this, and it enriches my faith as a Christian, and it deepens my journey because one of the things Buddhism teaches us is how to be still and to be present. How to be still and present. Not with how I would like things to be, not with the way I remember things as being, but how do I learn to be still and present with what's unfolding here and now? This is all we have--be still and present here. And I have also learnt about myself that it is very hard to be still ...and it is very hard for me to be present when I am angry. Sitting still when I am angry and it is 5 minutes can seem like, oh, an hour, two hours—that's torturous. Or when I feel ashamed or when I feel I have hurt someone.

A very wise teacher, he is a Roman Catholic Trappist monk Thomas Keating has said in his discovery—he is 80 odd years now—his discovery of his own path and working with people and teaching them how to be still and present, says you know: "We'll never be still and present as Christians as long as we fear our God, we just won't do it. We'll talk a lot to God, we'll talk a lot at God, we'll try to appease God and we'll try to win God's favor--we may even grovel before God but he says we won't be still and at peace before God. And I know it is very true in my life, and it is true of every one I have ever met who has tried to be still with God, when we are afraid of God we are not still with God, we run from God.

And I say that this morning, because we have some very powerful words in 1 Peter so pull out your worship book this morning. There's so much we could spend time on this morning but I want to look at our second reading which is 1 Peter. Which is one of the later lessons, one of the later books in the Christian canon or Scriptures. And about 4 or 5 lines down it talks about Christ's blood which is beyond all price, the blood of the spotless unblemished lamb. You see those words - the blood of a spotless unblemished lamb? Known before the world's foundation. And a few lines before that it talks about that it is this unblemished, this spotless lamb that

has delivered us. We have been delivered by Christ's blood—**those are powerful words, and they are words well known, not only by Christians but they are well known by those people, those faiths who are not Christians.** We have been the people who have been delivered by Christ's blood, the spotless unblemished lamb—and we have been reading these in the Easter season and we need to ask ourselves, what do these words mean? What could they mean because words can mean many things—there is no one meaning for anything. But you and I would say for the most part have been taught by our tradition a particular meaning of these words—and they are words that are tied up deeply with fear. And when we hear these words all the time we may not even know that they are tied up with fear—'coz the only way of understanding these words that we know.

You say—what am I talking about? We have a story line that we have been told that is our dominant story line and it has nurtured my faith and I would suggest or guess that it has nurtured most of your faiths. And **it's** a simple story line and it goes like this: We were created good, in the garden and then we sinned. Our forbears, Adam and Eve, sinned and so sinning they ruptured, they caused a breach in the cosmos between God and between humanity—and then humanity began to wonder how might this breach be fixed? How might this chasm between God and humanity be fixed? Because if it isn't fixed we are lost forever—we are lost forever—because of God's judgment that hangs over us. And in the middle ages, one of our greatest theologians St Anselm was reflecting on this and he was struggling with this and he had this question: why is it that God - why is it that Jesus as a human being, why is it we have this human being sent by God into our midst—in Latin he was called Cur Deus Homo—why this human being?

So in the middle ages—and Anselm is looking around—and he sees a world, it is his world—the only world this man knows, and you know, he says in our world there are people, well they would mostly be like you and me and there would be vassals, there would be serfs—and above these people there would be the lords, there would be the ladies, there would be the princes, there would be the princesses, there would be the kings and the queens and St Anselm says, you know it is a truth—it is a fact of our life that if one of us who is a serf, one of us is a vassal, if we insult, if we sin against our lord or lady, our prince or princess or our king or queen—the reality is there is no way we can make up for it. There is a breach and it is forever there. The only way the breach can be mended is if the king or the queen comes down to our level and graciously forgives us for the breach, and he said the same is true of God. He says the only way that we can be made at one again with God is if God

would send someone like Jesus to be killed upon the cross and shed his blood so that we might be free and saved once again.

I think some of that story resonates with you. Is it a story you have heard before? It is the story in our prayer book which has nurtured my faith. It is the story in our collects, it is the story in our Eucharistic Prayers. It has brought most of us to where we are. It is what Anselm called our theology of atonement. It is at the heart of the Easter story he said because finally we are made at one with God and we will not be cast away into damnation. That is because we have the pure and spotless, the unblemished lamb whose blood has set us free. Now if you don't happen to be Christian it's a difficult story here, but I don't think that is the main issue with the story. And I'll tell you, I don't think it does justice to who God is. I don't think it does justice to who the God of Jesus was and is.

If there is one thing we do know about the God of Jesus I believe and it is my experience, is that God knows Jesus to be the God of Love and that is in first John: Who is God? God is love—astounding words. When Jesus is baptized what does he realize that God is in his heart? I am the beloved Jesus says, I am the beloved and my God, my God, my father God, Abba God—which is why we use that translation Abba-God. That is an amazing phrase in First Century—not omnipotent God, not denying God is omnipotent but Abba-God—God you are my daddy—and you will love me and you will hold me until I die. And when Jesus feels forsaken in the desert, when he feels forsaken on the cross, it is to this Abba-God he turns and he says: my God my God I feel forsaken but into your hands I place my spirit. Because why? Because you are the center of the center or my heart. You are my salvation because you never depart from me. You are my salvation because you never condemn me. Jesus reveals to us a face of God which is utter love, which is forgiveness seventy times seven we are told in the gospel.

I would ask us to explore that Jesus does not make us one with God. Jesus reveals, and this is incredible mystery, incredible good news—Jesus reveals to us, and it is why we say that he is the Messiah, he is an anointed one, **he reveals to us that we are already at one with God - and why? Because God is always at one with us. God dwells in the center of the center of your heart and my heart and the heart of creation as a god of love and a god of forgiveness and there is nothing we can do that will turn God's face from us.** We can turn our face from God, but God will never turn his face from us and that is what Jesus reveals to us—that we are forever at one. And so I would say—yes, yes—Jesus is the unblemished, the spotless lamb in 1 Peter because if

you look at the center of his being his heart of hearts, there is a heart which dwells in God, totally devoted to God, because God is totally devoted to him.

Jesus was a savior for us because his heart burned with love so clear and so faithful to God and to you and me that he would sacrifice his life rather than compromise his love. He would sacrifice his life rather than compromise his love. That is someone who delivers us from our selfishness—and he says to you and he says to me do your hearts burn with this love? Broken as we are, as blind as we are, do our hearts burn with this love? That we would sacrifice everything for one another because of our love, not because we are perfect.

You know I talked with the kids this morning about Martin Luther King, Junior—now there is one flawed human being—there was one flawed human being—I am amazed his wife stayed with him. And if we are expecting only perfect human beings to lead us in this life we're never going to get anywhere—but if that very flawed human being who was not sent by God into this world to be crucified on a balcony in the South, I would say to you that is ludicrous—he is not sent to be assassinated—he was sent to teach us the way of love and to say that I will stand by my people black and white because I love them and I will pay the ultimate sacrifice because I love them—and that is the message of Jesus Christ, and it delivers us from death, it delivers us from selfishness, it is salvific and it is our hope. And we are asked by Luke today, can we learn to have hearts that burn with that love? And it is lifelong—but can we learn to have that type of love for one another to allow it burn our hearts, and to burn our hearts, and to burn our hearts deeply? Amen.