

Easter II
April 19, 2009
Trinity Cathedral
The Rev. Canon Catherine Nichols

**Peace Be With You:
Where are your Wounds?**

Today, the first Sunday after EASTER DAY, is called
Low Sunday.

Do you know why it is, by tradition, called that?

Because there is a slight contrast in the size of today's
congregation,

compared to last week, Easter Day, yes?

That may be it.

But I am convinced that it's actually called Low Sunday

because this is the day the preacher's store of original
ideas

is very low.

In my former position as Rector of a church

where it was up to me to preach nearly all of the
sermons

it was tough to crank out another after all the Holy
Week

and Great Vigil and Easter Day attempts.

Here at Trinity it is a real privilege to share the
preaching task.

You've heard so many words in the past two weeks.

On Palm Sunday Marcus Borg's superb sermon

about Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem
in contrast to that of the Imperial Governor,
set the stage for Holy Week.

Each day of the sober week

as we accompanied Jesus

through his last supper with his disciples,

his betrayal in the garden,

his mock trial, his crucifixion,

right into the fabulous day of Resurrection, just last
Sunday,

you have heard lots of words.

All of us preached our hearts out.

Bless you, you've had a lot to listen to.

Well, here I stand in your pulpit.

But why am I complaining? I get to talk Resurrection!

It might be Low Sunday, but the topic is Good News.

New Life.

The first words Jesus says to his friends in that upper
room

after the Resurrection:

“Peace be with you!”

Jesus isn't talking about world peace.

He offers us inner peace, spiritual peace,
a holy state of being.

Jesus' peace involves reconciliation, forgiveness, CALM.

But that's not the whole of it:

As we sing in one of my favorite hymns:

*The peace of God, it is no peace
but strife, closed in the sod....*

Jesus offers us inner peace in the midst of challenge.

Strife, closed in the sod. Challenge our whole life long.

In Alan Paton's book, Ah But Your Land is Beautiful,

the character Mr. Neme,

asked why he would jeopardize his life

in the struggle against apartheid, says,

When I go Up There, which is my intention,

the Big Judge will say to me,

'Where are your wounds?'

and if I say I haven't any, he will say

'Was there nothing to fight for?'

I couldn't face that question. (Synthesis, 4.10.95, p. 2)

“Peace be with you.”

Some of the most peace-filled people I have known
have been folks giving their lives to a struggle
about which they feel passionately.

Their wounds are deep, their scars ragged.

They have come to terms with who, for them, Jesus is.

Jesus' filling their lives has only added to their
troubles....

Bruises and bumps along the journey with Jesus.

When Mr. Neme chose to follow Jesus by risking,
by struggling against apartheid and its inherent evils,
he chose a painful, dangerous journey.

He had something to fight for.

The Big Judge would not be able to miss his wounds
when he reached those Pearly Gates!

“God's Peace is a treasure dearer than life.” (*Op. Cit*)

So where do your passions

-- and therefore the source of your wounds -- lie?

Two examples of folks who, like Mr. Neme,

risked wounds to expose an evil.

Marine biologist Rachel Carson: all of us born before the
mid-forties

remember her ground-breaking book Silent Spring
published in 1962.

I had to read it for a course in college. '62 was my
freshman year.

Silent Spring exposed the negative effects
-- and the shocking breadth of those deadly effects --
of the DDT used by nearly all farmers to keep weeds out
of their crops.

Dead animals in the fields,
poisoned brooks, streams, rivers, and oceans,
the thinning of birds' egg shells with early breakage ---
the effects moved up the chain of nature
and ended in us:

DDT in our systems from the plants, animals, and fish
we consumed.

I remember it was the first time I heard a clarion call
that ran against prevailing opinion,
a challenge that seemed huge,

as well as isolated.

Rachel Carson was attacked by the pesticide industry,
attacked by many scientists, vilified.

Her wounds must have been deeply painful.

She died of cancer only two years after Silent Spring
came out.

Carson did not consider herself a woman of faith:

her professed faith was in the gift of nature.

But I'll wager that The Big Judge has welcomed her
at the pearly gates, and caressed her wounds lovingly....

We all know that DDT hasn't been used in years,
largely because of the courageous work of Rachel
Carson.

A similar prophet, this one current.

My friend Bill McKibben wrote The End of Nature in
1989.

It exposed the rapidly advancing problem of climate
change,

and its disastrous effects,

fallout which would infect every corner of our world.

McKibben, too, was villified.

He was laughed at, called a non-scientist.

He indeed is not a scientist.

He is a brilliant man, a fine writer. In addition to his
books

he has now written articles in The New Yorker,
Atlantic Monthly, New York Times Magazine,
and on and on.

He is now much like Al Gore. He travels the world
talking about climate change (the more accurate term
for what ails Earth),

challenging folks across the United States with
initiatives.

He has become one of the bright stars
of the movement to combat Climate Change.

But his wounds:

he was excoriated!

Bill is a man of faith,

in fact he takes pride that he taught Sunday School
in the little United Methodist Church in the Adirondack
Mountains

where his family made their home

before they moved to Vermont, where I was lucky
enough

to get to know them.

He speaks to church groups, to businesses, to climate
change panels,

to committees of congress,

to anyone who wants some expert opinion on climate
change

and its solutions.

As a result of his passion, his mission,

he is not the only one in his family who has suffered:

he is away so much

that his wife and daughter rarely see him.

He is an evangelist, a loving, funny, passionate
evangelist,

for Earth Stewardship.

He's only in his fifties: I hope it will be a very long time
before Bill McKibben meets God at those Pearly Gates.

But when he arrives I know he will be welcomed
warmly!

Earth Day falls this week: let us give thanks for two
Earth Saints,

Rachel Carson & Bill McKibben.

So what is your passion?

Is it joining the Eldercare initiative to give food and care
to the older low-income people of NW Portland?

Is it in bringing joy to homebound folks by bringing
them communion,

sitting with them so as to bring the world to them
and help them feel less isolated?

Is it in sending an orphan to nursing school?

Whatever it is, it has got to challenge you to sacrifice,
it has got to wound you in some way, it cannot be easy,
because through your wounds, your hard bumps,
you attain The Peace of Christ.

Jesus brings us peace.

But as he offers us peace,

he challenges us to suffer.

Hear the faithful words of Mr. Neme:

'Where are your wounds?' God will ask us.

and if I say I haven't any, he will say

'Was there nothing to fight for?'

I couldn't face that question.

Dear friends,

what passion have you to fight for?