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# THE LINE

Newsletter of the Convocation Of The West  
OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS

## THE REAL JESUS



BY FR. MICHAEL PENFIELD

A priest friend of mine told me the story about a recent baptism. Because of Covid, in California only the immediate family and Godparents are allowed to attend a Baptism. And this was an infant Baptism.

At the appointed time, the family arrived with the infant and his three-year-old brother. As they entered the church, the three-year-old boy announced at the top of his lungs, "Where is Jesus? I want to see the REAL Jesus!"

So, the priest brought the family to the Tabernacle and said, "He is in there." "Really? Open it up. I want to see Jesus!"

At this point, the parents jumped in and said, "We can't. He's sleeping." To which the little boy responded, "Wake Him up. I want to see the real Jesus!" My friend then ended the story by saying that the family will have a lot of explaining to do.

When I heard this story, it really resonated with me. On one level, it seems symbolic of our society today. So many are hungry for the Gospel; so many are desperate to see the "real" Jesus. But, on another level it seems to speak about the believers' "embarrassment" as to what we believe. And, I think it is important that we address both of these things.

Our little boy is stating very clearly what the

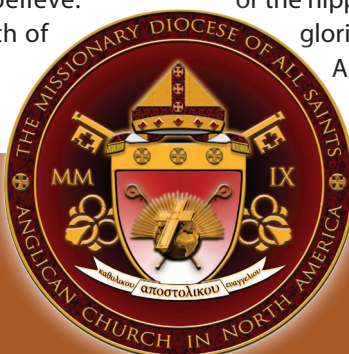
world has always asked of us believers. "Show us the real Jesus." This reminds me of a comedy skit I saw years ago. In it, the characters talked about which image of Jesus they liked the best. "I like the baby Jesus," one professed. "I like to picture Jesus as a hippy," said another, and so on and so forth. Each gave their reason. It was a silly skit, of course, but I believe it reveals much with regard to the current status of our faith. I wonder if we all don't do this.

How many like the Jesus who puts a child on His knee and blesses him as opposed to the Jesus who makes a whip and drives the moneychangers out of the Temple? How many of us prefer the Risen Christ to the Christ suffering, bloodied, and dying on the Cross? And how many of us would rather that Jesus never said that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven. How many of us "clean up" our image of Jesus in our mind? How many of us sanitize Him to make what He said more palatable?

But the world doesn't necessarily want to see the baby Jesus, or the hippy Jesus. They don't necessarily want to see just the glorified Jesus either. They want to see the "real" Jesus. And they want to really see Him because the world is hungry for the truth – the unvarnished truth!

### Our Core Value is:

*"The Convocation of the West is Missionary, bringing people to Christ and meaningfully engaging in the transformation of the culture around us."*



### The Vision of the Convocation is:

*"To STRENGTHEN existing churches;  
To PLANT new churches; and  
To RAISE UP missional leaders."*

Between news outlets and the Internet, between Twitter and Facebook, we are fast approaching a cynicism that will rival the cynicism of the average Soviet citizen who didn't believe any of the official news coming out of Pravda. We have everybody telling us "their truth" – as if truth is always personal and never objective. People are hungry for the Truth, and they expect us Christians and us "true believers" to know it. And now that it looks like we are coming close to the end of the pandemic lockdown, I believe that many will be searching for this Truth, and we, as Christians need to be prepared to lead them to the "real" Jesus.

But this brings me to the second part that struck me about my friend's tale: I believe many of us are ashamed or at least embarrassed as to what we believe. When my friend was telling this story, I kept on hoping he would throw open the Tabernacle. But, fear intervened. Children are quite gifted in comprehending the mysteries surrounding our faith. The priest and the parents needed to trust this child to see beyond the apparent, and grasp the Real Presence.

When I was rector of a church, the church I served tended to be low. They were also quite traditional. So, no child could receive communion until after their confirmation, and confirmation did not occur until they were about 13 years old. Unfortunately, I found that, by that age, children were already becoming jaded. These children were having difficulty seeing the mystery that surrounds Holy Eucharist. I then spoke to the Vestry. I wanted to start having "First Holy Communion" for children at age 7 (an old Roman Catholic tradition that I decided to appropriate). I was granted reluctant permission, but it was perfect. These younger children got it. They could comprehend the Real Presence better than their older brothers or sisters. Likewise, I am convinced that this 3 year old would have seen the real Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament housed in that Tabernacle.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we have Saint Peter announcing something that troubles many of us modern Christians:

"[L]et it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." [Acts 4:10-12]

I want you to pause and think about this statement. Saint Peter was a blunt man. He stated things without being diplomatic and

certainly without guile. Peter is testifying here that, through the name of Christ, a lame man was made whole. Peter testified that Christ rose from the grave and that, only through the name of Jesus, are we saved. There is no beating around the bush, and there are no clauses, conditions or limitations stated. By the name of Jesus a lame man was made whole. And only through Jesus are we saved. That is it.

Many modern Christians want to avoid this last statement. To many, stating that only through Jesus are we saved, seems too harsh and too exclusive. It is not something that is brought up in polite circles and certainly not at a party. But this IS our faith. This is what we are commanded to believe, and it is what we do believe. Does God save others who do not know Christ? Well, that

is something we leave in God's hand. But what we are told through the Gospel is that Christ is the only way to God. He is the direct, straight, narrow path. We who believe are on that path. And what is more, we are commanded to share what we know with others so that they may join us on this same path.

The real Jesus is for what this world hungers. It is the loving Son of God

who was willing to suffer for us, bear our sins, and carry us to God so that we could become the adopted children of God. Jesus is the one who teaches us to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. But He is also the one who commands us to love, not just our neighbors, but also our enemies — the ones who despitely use us.

The real Jesus commands us to be more like Him every day, no matter how hard that may be. And He also commands us to share the Good News to a hurting, dark world. But we cannot share this good news without being honest. We cannot show the world whom Christ is unless we reveal Him honestly. We cannot help those who are lost without presenting the "real" Jesus.

So, this is what I ask all of us to do. Please in every way you can think of show all those around you the real Jesus. Do not be ashamed of what you believe. For what we believe is the Truth, and the Light and the Life. It can set people free, and it can make us one with God. Let us show the world the Truth. Let us show the Light of Christ. And let us bring more people to Life – an eternal Life with God – by revealing to them the Real Jesus.

Amen,

The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield  
Vicar General for the Convocation of the West





"Clean out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover has been sacrificed. *Therefore* let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

"*Therefore* if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is" (Colossians 3:1).

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? *Therefore* we have been buried with him through baptism into death so that as Christ was raised from the dead...so we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4).

Christ is risen!

Indeed he is risen, the central historical fact in the existence of our species, and the defining moment for each of our lives. The Gospels for Easter announce this with remarkable simplicity, a bare witness to the facts by the various disciples as they each encountered the events, from the unexpected empty tomb through the Ascension.

The epistles appointed for Easter, as quoted above, take it to the next step. The Resurrection has happened entirely through the action of God, with no help from us. We are the passive recipients of its consequences, consumers of unmerited grace and love. But St. Paul introduces a "therefore." How does the Resurrection change our lives and plans?

It is a disturbing question, because over the centuries since Biblical days, unmerited grace and love was replaced by merit and good deeds as the way to earn God's favor. And modern preachers at countless funerals tell God that the deceased "was a good person," worthy of inclusion in the heavenly precincts.

The Reformation happened precisely because of this (no, Martin Luther didn't do it to give us individual freedom, or the authority to interpret the Bible for ourselves, let alone to institute capitalism or western democracy). Luther called the Church back to the message of unmerited grace, as proclaimed by the Gospels and St. Paul. Alas, it didn't stick. Soon, Calvinists and Puritans, Mennonites and Anabaptists, and eventually Holiness and Pentecostals, LDS and Jehovah's Witnesses muddied the waters, returning to reworked versions of the medieval Roman Catholic view. By the Eighteenth Century, even the Lutherans were swept by pietism, with the same pitch.

If America has a "Judeo-Christian" heritage, it is this one, that "good people" are righteous, rewarded visibly by God, ascending to heaven on the pleasing incense of their good deeds and pious living, after a lifetime of filling the churches with prayers for prosperity, security, and national triumph, with God smiting enemies domestic and foreign. There is no need for Easter in this scenario, which is perhaps why the celebration tends to be dominated by an amazing egg-laying rabbit.

Can we get it right, at this late date in the supposed existence of Christianity in America? One humorist noted that before the nation rejects Christianity, which it currently seems to be moving towards, we might at least want to try it first. Because the Christian message really hasn't been proclaimed among us, or when it has, it competes with a plethora of distortions, all claiming to be the Christian message.

So, let's try again. Christ is risen! This is because we absolutely need the grace and love of God or we are toast. "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." It need not be a complex or obscure message. The New Testament, which for Christians is the

lens through which we see life, including how we see the Old Testament, is that message of love made incarnate through the person of Jesus Christ, who died for us and rose from the dead. This is because we cannot do this for ourselves.

The New Testament ties this to the Sacrament of Baptism. "We have been buried with him through baptism into death so that as Christ was raised from the dead...so we too might walk in newness of life." It is not achieved by some "conversion" experience, nor by your exemplary life or devotion to your family and church or service to your country. You need to die, end it all, drown the attachment to the old ways that crowd out God's love. Cleanse out the old leaven, sour and bitter, bereft of power to rise. Only baptism can do this for you, God's cleansing action of effectual grace. Nothing else works, nothing. At the Great Vigil on Easter Eve, we renew our baptismal commitment, precisely because it is the key to remembering that we have been washed with the unmerited love of God in that baptism and it alone can give us entrance to the gift of Resurrection and the Easter festival.

The first therefore is thus to remember we are baptized, drowned to the old way of doing things, and in the Resurrection action, are raised to new life.

The second therefore is to remember with gratitude and thanksgiving, Eucharist, the gift of new life we have been given. We celebrate the feast, the Paschal joy is ours. This feast lasts for fifty days, a wow of a party, because it is the happiest thing that has ever happened. That the feast in many quarters is tepid and brief tells you what you need to know about the perceived value of the gift received. When Lent is observed in all seriousness and Easter is said and done in a day or two, there is a terrible distortion of a joyful triumph turned into a mournful penance, rather than the reverse. Sometimes, Christians have a terrible time being happy.

The third therefore is the mandate "to go *therefore* and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Easter

joy is meant to be shared. How can you keep such a triumph and transformation to yourself, unless perhaps you think it isn't real? But it is the most real event of all history, more real than sin, more real than our failures. Evangelism isn't about civilization, clever arguments, signing up people for church, scaring people about Hell. It is about sharing the effective love of God

The fourth therefore is about a transformed set of standards, a new lifestyle, not just for Easter Sunday, nor even for fifty days of celebrating, but in the glorious reality of everyday. Malice and wickedness, greed and fear, revenge and conquest are the daily bread of our neighbors, and more than a few of our fellow churchgoers. But the gift of love received is always the gift of love shared, as a way of life. Imagine life lived in such a manner, "so we too might walk in newness of life."

The fifth therefore is to understand we are baptized into the Body of Christ. It is not the Church as institution which is important. In fact, the institution is often counter-productive. But the community of Christ's people, incorporated into the Body, the living organism of Christ, nourished with his own true Body and Blood, is the vibrating love which sustains the whole earth and you and I with it.

To summarize, God so loves us that he sent his Son to be incarnate and be resurrected for us, to restore us to our fulfilled humanity. He did not do this because we did so many good things that he simply couldn't resist. He did it in spite of our behavior, not because of it. But he did it. Grace is our free gift from God, entirely done by him, not us. How do we respond to that overwhelming sacrificial love? Surely by rejoicing. But also, having received such love, we also therefore respond by reflecting and sharing that love, being new creatures absorbed by the love of God. In a consumer society, it is perhaps routine that we receive such a gift, but do not therefore participate in the gift. St. Paul makes it clear that we are called to participate, to respond with the "therefore," to be new every morning in our baptismal covenant.

Christ is risen. Therefore, keep the feast.

## Upcoming Virtual General Synod

The Missionary Diocese of All Saints will be holding their 2021 Virtual General Synod via Zoom, on **Saturday, May 22 at 10 am PDT, 11 am MDT, 12 noon CDT, 1 pm EDT**. This is an important Synod. We will be electing new representatives to several national councils and conducting the second vote on the Amendments to the Constitution and Canons of MDAS that were passed at our last virtual Synod. Therefore, we need to see as many of you as we can!

**All clergy, including non-parochial and retired clergy, and the representatives and alternative representatives of all parishes are to attend.** Please make sure that you have elected your two representatives before May 22, 2021, and please send their names along with their phone numbers and their email addresses as soon as possible to your Vicar General at [VicarGeneral@AnglicanCOW.org](mailto:VicarGeneral@AnglicanCOW.org) or 408-969-4915. **Please note that your Vicar General's email address may be different than the one you may have saved.**

If you or your representatives subsequently discover that they will not be able to attend, please notify your Vicar General as soon as you find this out and have alternative representatives ready and available.

We hope to see you all on our Zoom conference! God bless.