

The Journey Home

Sermons for Holy Week

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Introduction

It's Holy Week. It has taken 40 days to be here in Holy Week. Throughout these weeks and into the week before us, two themes stand out constantly throughout the appointed Scripture readings: Sojourning and pilgrimage.

Someone is going somewhere, somehow, and then only staying for a spell before heading out again. That's a sojourn. (*Sojourn* happens to share a root with *journey*: *jour*, the French word for *day*.) Prophets, apostles, martyrs, saints and even Jesus, himself, seem to be people determined to be somewhere, else, but that place is invariably Jerusalem. Scripture says, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem." That inevitability seems like an invitation to utter catastrophe ... If you are a friend of Jesus.

Pilgrimage is a journey for a religious purpose, often having a particular destination and purpose, and so a bit more exacting/demanding than sojourning. Some years ago, on my first pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, I found myself walking alone and muttering. It had been an exceptionally hard couple of days of walking and I was grouching with the universe in general, noting for the celestial record that I was truly fed up—no, disgusted—with the journey. My head ached, my feet hurt, I was hungry and tired and very disagreeable. Then in a moment of revelation/enlightenment, I realized that I was the same man who had spent nearly 30 years preaching and encouraging people to think of life as a pilgrimage—A journey to God, as it were. Now I was on the real one and completely fed up. Introspection followed. Then, bursting into gales of laughter and turning red from shame, I came to see that I hadn't reckoned on what a journey of such intensity would mean, especially in the realm of personal reflection on the road, itself. Now I was

living it as a pilgrimage and daily experiencing it as a sojourn. I suspect Jesus' followers back then felt the same way. They were ready to bring in the Reign of God, which Jesus had promised. But they weren't expecting conflict, crisis, and crucifixion.

A pilgrimage is most often understood in context of going to witness some great religious event, viewing a religious relic or site, even touching or venerating a religious object or taking part in some religiously significant commemoration it is for the up-building of faith. A journey is mostly movement or passage between one place and another. To get it right, a pilgrimage is always a journey, but a journey is not always a pilgrimage. Sojourning means spending time with or in a specific area or place or with a person and then eventually departing for other places or even home. This Journey Home, which is called Holy Week, is both pilgrimage and sojourn, depending on where you are in your story today. So I am sojourning with you on your pilgrimage through Holy Week.

Holy Week is a pilgrimage. When undertaken in the right spirit—that of openness and receptivity—the liturgies of Holy Week enable us to identify with the passion of Christ, giving us clarity to see the many passions being enacted around us every day, Holy Week and Easter, notwithstanding. The frame of these thoughts, meditations, and sermons during Holy Week is one of Passion: God's passionate search for us, given witness in the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Scripture. I have chosen to follow the scriptural lectionary propers set for these services over the course of the week.

I have also chosen to include details from stories from my life. Stories from where I grew up in Texas and from my home in northern New Mexico. Stories from the road (quite literally;

the Road to Santiago de Compostela in Spain), roads which I walked twice. And stories from my work among those living with HIV/AIDS. These stories are summative, if not illustrative, of my sense of the Passion of Jesus: Palm Sunday through Good Friday, leading to Easter. These are the events we remember and live into this day. These stories are simply remembrances of how and where I see the Christ in the midst of life, still beckoning and challenging us... Still calling us out into the deeper water and total engagement with God and his love.

This series of preachments were preached in real time at Blackburn Cathedral, Lancashire, UK, and at Calvary Episcopal Church in Williamstown, New York, US, over the past decade. It is important to understand at the outset that I was challenged to construct these thoughts without an explanation of what was said in Scripture, nor was it deemed necessary discuss when it was written; or to try to explicate what Jesus was saying back then. I was asked to explore who and where Jesus is for me and what he saying to us now. Thus, you will not find a faint or accurate retelling of the story embedded in these sermons as is the wont of many preachers. The Biblical testimony serves as the jumping off or is it the jumping in place where my pilgrimage to Easter Day begins? Please join me in this sojourn, pilgrimage and perhaps even a journey into God's all-encompassing love and compassion.

Acknowledgments/Mentors

I have to give recognition to my two mentors for this journey of praying, preparation, and preaching: The Very Reverend Alan Jones, formerly Dean of Grace Cathedral, San Francisco. His book, *Passion for Pilgrimage: Notes for the Journey Home* (Harper and Row, 1989) has been a guide; and, the Reverend Barbara Brown Taylor, writing in her book, *Home By Another Way*

(Cowley Publications, 1999) reminds of my roots and places of beginning. These two friends have provided deep insights into the events and actions of Holy Week driving me to deeper reflection and action. They seemed to lead me by the nose, to sniff out the less obvious meanings lurking within me. I bow to them, and where I have quoted or used their insights, I hope it is received as honoring them and their brilliance.

About the Preacher, The Reverend Canon Ted Karpf, BA, ThM

Involved in organized religion for more than two thirds of my life, I still find aspects of my involvement compelling and thrilling as well as depressing and predictable in spite of where I have worked. I have spent most of my ministry outside of the institutional church working in the world of public health and international development, HIV/AIDS striving for human well-being. I have been given the space and depth to explore faith—Both mine and those around me. I have talked openly with the Creator and heard the “*strange still small voice*” over the din of despair and triumph. While some elements of my participation in organized religion have left me feeling embarrassed and humiliated at the foolishness of the failures of the institutional framework we call the church, in which I have served faithfully for nearly 50 years, my faith has remained secure. I am not religious per se, in that I do not shift to religion for answers as much as see religion as the space in which questions of authenticity and integrity are legitimately raised.

I am a father, a friend, a teacher and a priest: One who observes his vows with more commitment than I publicly allow. But more than this, I am a stranger. I live on the periphery of many communities, commitments and communions and have done so for most of my life. I have been often seen to be at the center, but in reality I am always a bit to the side of things. I have wandered in the corridors of power, yet rarely taken it for myself, fearful that power corrupts or maybe I felt myself too unworthy to lead. Yet today, I am leading, perhaps more by example than by decree. And that is good.

Palm Sunday

Greetings and Peace! Holy Week is a baptism by fire, yielding at Easter to Baptism by water, and by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. I live in the dry, barren, high desert of northern New Mexico. Often best known through the paintings of the late Georgia O'Keeffe, this land often sees less than a dozen inches of rain per year. Water, then, is of the highest value as it is the lifeblood of where I live. My place is on the banks of one of only a handful of rivers in the north. The Rio Chama joins the Rio Grande, just a few miles from my home. Without the rivers life there would be impossible.

To further enhance the power of water, the invading Spanish conquerors introduced irrigation through a watercourse called an *acequia* more than 500 years ago. These large irrigation ditches draw the water from the river, then move it through a series of hand dug ditches, each extending off the main channel onto each farm. The land is flooded by water moving over it, thereby returning the water to the river miles downstream. To maintain this fragile system, everyone along the *acequia* must maintain the earthen walls of their own smaller ditch and clean it from weeds and roots, which tend to take up life in the moist earth each spring. To maintain the *acequia* is to maintain life itself, for oneself and one's community.

One of the most efficient ways to clean the *acequia* of weeds and harden the ditch walls is to burn it. Each year, throughout early Lent each of us along the *acequia* cuts, rakes, and burns our section of the main ditch and then the smaller ditches down into our fields. It is truly a trial by fire spending 6 to 10 hours cleaning and burning.

At the end of March the whole community gathers to remove the overgrowth around the main *acequia* and to clean those sections where the owners are too infirm to clean it or are away

from the land. It is a sacred responsibility and the means of bonding with the land and the larger *pueblo*—The community.

Holy Week is much like burning those ditches. We clear the ditches of our faith—choked with the weeds of despair and doubt, the collapsed walls of confusion and fear, and the clods of hopelessness—to become the conduits of faith we were called to be; where hope is restored and faith is renewed pondering again, the mystical story of our faith and history.

The “Journey Home” is our theme for Holy Week. It is our homecoming week, our ditch-clearing week. There is no day in church year more fraught with meanings than Palm Sunday. It is a time which strikingly sets the paradox of faith and the ambiguity of revelation. But this day is *not* our destination. It is a crucial way station where we are invited to pause, collecting our thoughts and releasing of self-recrimination and self-flagellation over our success or failure in Lent. Now, that sojourn done, we may now get on with turning our faces toward Jerusalem.

Jesus enters like a conqueror—head held high, acknowledging the accolades of the crowd—in this parody of power knows he is to die; defeated, abandoned, and rejected. He is proclaimed Lord and King today, only to be made King of Fools, clothed in rags mocking royalty, crowned with thorns as he is led away to crucifixion by the end of this week.

Our liturgy sets forth these contrasts and confrontations. When he dies, he does so, not at the hands of bad or evil people, but at the hands of the well-meaning, sincerely-intended, passionately concerned, piously-motivated, politically astute and socially-aware people of God. He is executed on the two of the most fundamental pillars of western civilization—Roman law and Jewish piety, which I call “the cross point”. Though absolutely innocent, he is condemned by the highest authorities of his day: The Church and the State. Nonetheless, his cross is raised,

situated between two thieves: One good and one bad, reflecting the reality of the heavens and hells in which we live.

Palm Sunday: This is the day of passions and possibilities.

- There is the passion of the multitude: theirs is a plea for justice and equity, but more importantly, release: “*Save us now!*” They cry. “*Save us from hopelessness ... Save us for hope ... Save us now!*” They are passionate in their expectations and hopeful in their passion.
- There is also the passion of the servant himself, Jesus. The servant is hailed, but before the week is out he will be assaulted; honored, but to be ridiculed. He, alone, knows a holy and terrifying secret: Faith is *not* about listening to the mob, but about listening to God. He rides on majesty knowing that goodness can be defeated in this life; righteousness and kindness can be abused, and even trampled, and hope can be lost. He knows that loneliness and sorrow can annihilate life and that even the ‘good’ can and do die young. He knows all of this and more.
- His passion and his purpose is obedience; obedience to God and to the deepest truth in his soul. By his self-offering, he unmaskes our self-deception; reveals our callousness; shatters our romantic optimism, and exposes our faithlessness. He passionately holds on to a quiet, but severe hope—as that which cannot be seen—but only kindled in the eternity of God’s power to raise up something New ... Out of the ashes of death.

We celebrate—albeit awkwardly—all of these aspects, somewhat secure in the knowledge that if Jesus had *not* really been who he is ultimately revealed to be, then today’s

drama of palms and death would be nothing more than a peculiarly tasteless spoof, from which perhaps a few throw away lines might have emerged. But on this strange day of triumph and tragedy we are also beckoned to “Come home”. Much of Jesus’ teaching focused on return ... Return to God: “Come home” he cries out, reminding us over and over again: “*God has fallen in love with you and wants you to come home.*”

We must remember: That while thousands welcomed him *home*, for the vast majority of humanity the world went on with “business as usual”. Of those who were aware of the event, a few laughed at the spectacle, others scorned, and some even became threatened. But on the whole, the outcome appeared to be nothing. This is how God always works.

The cross—an instrument of torture, of public, shameful humiliation—is the cost Jesus pays for living in a “mixed” world of the human and divine. He is simultaneously shattered, broken, and yet complete within himself. Jesus demonstrates that reality is not meaningless and absurd because it isn’t fair, logical, or consistent as much as we would wish it were. Reality is filled with terrible contradictions and injustices.

Jesus is never really king in any publicly-recognizable sense. He can only be accepted and incorporated into our lives as Lord and Savior, King of Glory, by those who know themselves to be his subjects. What we celebrate today is not Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem so long ago, but *his* triumphal entry into our hearts. Dear friends, welcome home: May we have a blessed Holy Week. + Amen.

Maundy Thursday Evening

I grew up in Texas, which maybe explains my peculiar American accent and unusual use of language and my outgoing style. I cannot come to this time without emotion. This is a time of deep life-changing remembrance for me. I made my first Holy Communion on this night more nearly sixty years ago. It is the Triduum, the Three Days, an especially sacred time in the mind and heart of the church. What happens on this night and what happened from that night has shaped every action of my faith and ministry from that day to this.

It is also tornado season in Texas this time of year. Tornadoes, and taking shelter when you hear the alarm, were always part of the rituals of spring, along with the Christian celebration of Easter. Rarely seen in European climes, tornadoes are the result of the violent collision of disparate forces: a cold front and warm front in violent collision. When these forces of unequal pressure collide, a vortex is created. In a vortex, pressure is lowest at the center, where the circling speed is greatest, and rises progressively with distance from the center. The spout of a tornado is a classic and frightening example of the visible core of a vortex. Often accompanied by thunderstorms and lightening, tornadoes move across the land with unprecedented speed and violence, wreaking fierce destruction.

Entering the vortex of Roman law and Jewish piety—what I call the cross point—Jesus prepares for his final struggle. Not only is he in the swirling and often violent collision of cultures, values and traditions, but on a larger plane he is entering the vortex of good and evil. The hard to bear fact of life is that for every possibility for good to be unleashed in the world by his witness and sacrifice, there is an equal and opposing possibility for evil. Thus unknown but

familiar challenges will be released by his last stand: Of being true to self and to God. Being in this place of knowing Jesus models how one lives in this night of final acts.

Standing, kneeling and sitting at table, he is with his closest followers. He is present in the midst of their confusion and apprehension in that upper room. We know from scripture that he would be in that room again, but as his resurrected self, opening their hearts. Tonight, though, is his last chance to prepare them and us for our entrance into the vortex. He bequeaths to us through the Eucharist the means by which we can reconnect with him and with each other, but most of all, with the God through the Eucharist. We are called to face into this cosmic collision as we enter the three-days: the Passover of the Christian Church. Here is where the in the real work of the people begins. In these next days we will undergo a complete enactment of his story, preparing us for our future. Look at the sequence:

- He demonstrates love by stripping himself and washing their feet; reminding that each of us that as He is servant to all, so should we be as well.
- He gives us the Last Supper; a final meal in a series of meals, in which he tells us that we can easily find him at table with each other, if only we would look and listen and let our hearts decide.
- He also delivers his last words; concluding with his personal farewell, informing us again that we are loved infinitely and forever, and that we are his friends.
- He leads us to a garden, the olive press—called Gethsemane—to learn what it means to watch, wait and pray. While he will be disappointed and discouraged by our frailties, he will undergo his own struggle, wrapped in the same isolation that most of us know in our

own struggles. By this act he blesses all those who suffer the same interior doubt about faith in isolation; even as his followers struggle just to stay awake.

- He will come to know the abandonment and confusion of his followers as he is led away to suffer and die, alone.

We will see Jesus transformed from leader and teacher, Master and Messiah ... To a Dead Man Walking!

Even the words are stark: Dead man walking. It's an actual experience recounted in the book and movie by the same name. It is the story of a religious, a nun, working in the prisons of Louisiana. She becomes the spiritual counselor to a death row inmate. John Poncelet is convicted of the double murder of a young couple. Her name is Sister Helen Prejean. As she works to bring light to his soul, Sister Helen must also reconcile his need for forgiveness to the heinous brutality of his crime and the grief of the parents over their murdered children. As part of the execution by electrocution, there is a death march. The condemned must remove their shoes and walk barefoot to the electric chair. This action ensures electrodes will be attached to the bared feet, guaranteeing death by electrocution.

As this story unfolds we find that John Poncelet has begun the process of peace-making with his soul, and then he is told that he will soon be executed. His reaction: Fearful and violent when the prison guards who, upon entering his cell, direct that he remove his shoes and socks. Poncelet cries out in his last defense, "My shoes!" he pleads, "Please don't take my shoes. I don't want them to see my feet ... I feel so alone ... I'm so afraid."

Sister Helen, counseling Poncelet says: “Soon you must die, but I want the last face you see to be the face of love. Sitting in that chair look at me. I will be there for you. I will be there with you.”

As he is led down to certain death, the inmates and guards in an almost solemn chant call out, “Dead man walking”.

It’s about the feet: So necessary, so exposed. Being barefoot reveals our vulnerability. Whether figuratively or actuality we really can’t run away when we’re barefoot. Many Christians feel vulnerable to the challenge posed by the act of foot washing. While many of us can and do serve, we have great deal of difficulty being served. To allow ourselves to be served means we have surrendered our power, our control and perhaps ... Even our lives!

When we enact this drama of Jesus’ death we, too, are invited to see his face; the face of love. Unlike John Poncelet, Jesus is *not* guilty of anything, except unmitigated love; nonetheless, he, is a dead man walking. We are invited to see him, perhaps for the first time in this horrific moment, walking through the streets of Jerusalem carrying his own cross.

When Jesus dies, he is ready because he has been anointed, washed, and prepared. He has faced his demons and is freed to face ridicule and scorn, violence and betrayal. We can bear as much because he has been there before us, hallowing the emptiness and darkness. We can and will grieve our misdeeds and forsakenness in his death. The Apostle Paul reminded us that *“Baptized with Him in death like his, we will be raised like His”*.

To go forward, we begin by allowing ourselves to receive the Last Rites of our Lord, the washing of our feet, where the baptism into our Passover begins. We enter the vortex of the sacred three days: these are the days of awe—The Passover of our God. + Amen.

The Seven Last Words of Christ: Seven Meditations

1. “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 24:34)

Several years ago, I found myself walking the pilgrim’s way to Santiago de Compostela. For more than a thousand years, Christians have found themselves on this pilgrimage to view the silver casket said to contain the earthly remains of *San Tiago*—Saint James—who is said to have evangelized those inhabiting the coast line of Spain and Portugal. The tribe called the *Gallaeci* were of the Celts—the forebears of many of us—who would bring new shape, form and spirituality to the Christianity practiced in these isles of Great Britain.

The pilgrimage follows much the same path as it has since its beginning in the ninth century, when the bones were exhumed and honored by the local bishop, Theodemir / Bishop Theodemir of Iria. The journey follows the route of the original Roman Road to Finisterre (the end of the world), in itself an amazing experience to walk, recumbent in history and lore. The Camino is littered with numerous sites and remains of a world long past. Yet, traversing it at 25 kilometers per day, those worlds are persistently present.

The most compelling image from that entire journey remains the medieval triptych panel of the Crucifixion, hanging in the Cathedral at Burgos. The figure of Christ appears to be more like a paper doll being nailed to a cross. However, upon closer examination one discovers that the free left arm is being stretched by a rope looped round his wrist. It is being pulled, in yet another form of agony, by a soldier or slave who must bare his arm to pull the rope tight enough before the Christ can be nailed to the wood. My response to this image is deeply visceral.

Instantly I am reminded of the traditional Friday noonday collect which says, "*Lord Christ at this hour you hung on the hard wood of the cross to put us within the reach of your saving embrace. ...*" Never before had I conceived of the Christ being pulled literally apart to stretch his arms far enough to contain the world while suffering such intense agony.

We, too, are called upon to be stretched nearly beyond our limits to be the love of God in this world and the comfort of a Christ, as the one who holds each person close enough to embrace. I wonder is it God who is pulling Christ's arms wider and stretching him beyond endurance. Or is it we, who are doing the pulling, to include us all? Again, I am forced to consider who is stretching me to expand my embrace of life? Is it God or is it my ego or is it my sense of human need?

Scripture tells us that He prays to spare those who kill him. Arms outstretched to contain a Godly embrace for the world.

A priestly friend tells of a Eucharist. As he stretched out his arms and said, "*Lift up your hearts*", one of the children in the congregation cried out: "*Look Mommy. He's trying to look like Jesus.*" Come to think of it, that's not a bad thing to say about a Christian. But for us it is more than affecting a "look." We—each of us—must follow him down the narrow way of the Passion ... *All the way home.* God has fallen in love with you and wants you to come home. Father forgiven them ... + Amen.

2. “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43)

Growing up in Texas, often referred to as the buckle on the Bible Belt, the season of Lent marked the arrival of spring: a season rife with tornadoes, warm days, and cool nights. It was also when the ground-covering winter wheat shot up almost overnight. These “first fruits” were usually ready to harvest by late May or early June. In the church, we call it Pentecost.

For many this season was known as revival time! It was quite a contrast with the Lenten season of the Catholics and Episcopalians, who were marked with ashes on Ash Wednesday, and committed themselves to devout practices of prayer and reflection, walking the Way of the Cross in their churches or saying the Rosary. It was a season of reflective quiet. In the so-called Protestant non-liturgical traditions revivals are common. Repentance for sins known and unknown was expected and Baptisms of the “saved” were performed. When the sap of faith rises and growth is abounding, folk seem to get feverish about their religion.

His name was Sonny. I had met him a few times at his sister’s home. She was a parishioner trying desperately to “save” her brother. He was well-known to the County sheriff and other law enforcement officials for his wild ways. Charming and rather funny he was what we call, a “rounder”, defined as “a dissolute person; usually a man who is morally unrestrained.” That would summarize Sonny very well. But he had a certain kind of humility of having no pretense, admitting to being such; and, in his own way, he loved the Lord.

Early one spring, Sonny was killed in a car crash during a police chase. His family of origin was mostly Bible-believing Baptists, as they are called locally, though his sister had left their church years before. I was asked to assist at the funeral, which was curiously well-well-

attended by “Bible Baptists”, waiting to hear about the final judgment; most of our county law enforcement officials, who I think wanted to be sure that he was certifiably no longer a problem to be solved. A fire and brimstone Baptist preacher presided. After 30 to 40 minutes of threats and assurances of hell fire and damnation—which well might have been justified—it was my turn to speak.

I looked around at the full house. I couldn't imagine bringing any judgment down on anyone for anything. Sonny had done it all, to be sure, but there was a certain beguiling grace in him, in his knowing who he was and why. He was not much different than the thief who asked Jesus to remember him that day on the cross. I looked up heaven and down to the text, reading this very same passage aloud, much to the surprise of the assembled. Then with all the conviction I could muster, I said, “Now if Jesus can love and accept a dying criminal on a cross, then he could surely accept and welcome Sonny into the eternal habitations. Let us pray that we all might find our way there by following Jesus, no matter how far.” And then took my seat. The silence was deafening. Someone broke into a spontaneous singing leading the rest of us in all of the verses of “Amazing Grace”. As folk left the funeral chapel, they stopped to shake my hand and thank me, most saying, “Thanks for those words of hope.” Repeating me saying, “Indeed, if Jesus could love a thief, he can surely love me.”

Even in his dying, Jesus extends his ministry of acceptance. He remains controversial to the very end curiously becoming the bridge—the pontifex (“bridge-maker” in Latin)—the man holding the world between the lost and the found, the broken and restored, the bitter and reconciled, and the terrified and the hopeful.

Hanging there before us, he reminds that while there is only one cross hanging in most Christian churches today, invisibly there are three. American Episcopalian preacher, Barbara Brown Taylor, adds this insight, “God knows that you and I swap places with the thieves, often daily; demanding that God do this or that, if God is God.” This is why we are gathered here as the church because God has fallen in love with us and even though God knows what and who we are, God still wants us to come home. It is said that it takes only one cross to kill a man; and it takes three to make a church. +Amen.

3. “Woman, here is your son!” and “Here is your mother!” (John 19:26-27)

When I am not in Geneva working—the place where they have to take me in no matter I’ve done (to paraphrase Robert Frost from his poem, “The Death of the Hired Man”)—is in far northern New Mexico. It is a state located between Texas and Arizona. This land is inhabited by the descendants of the *Conquistadors*, who came in the 16th century and stayed, intermarrying with the native Pueblo peoples. It is a staggeringly beautiful and cruel land of high desert, mesas, mountains and plateaus and very little water. It is also a place alive with myth and tradition going back thousands of years. This is where I have called home for nearly three decades. Curiously it is the place where I gained a new family—the *Penitentes*—as a result of my participation in their Holy Week observances more than a decade ago. *Los Hermanos Penitentes* are a group of lay men who gather for prayer, worship, and spiritual discipline based on the practices of their brothers and monks in Spain more than 500 years ago, and to this day the discipline is kept and passed down through families.

Much as we are doing here, the Good Friday events are commemorated with love and devotion by the *Penitentes*. Whole communities and villages gather to make processions, carrying life-sized crosses and *bultos*—life-sized clothed papier mâché’ figures who are mentioned in the story of the Crucifixion; especially the darkly clad Maria, *Madre de Dolorosa*—Mary, Mother of Sorrows. But in this tableau she is in an intense conversation with her son on the Cross, laying claim to the fact that she is suffering as much as he. She reminds him that he has created much of her suffering since his birth. It is not a scriptural rendition, per se, but it is something that resonates more deeply; something within the soul. The universal story of life and death: of suffering, of love and death, the sacrifices of a mother for her child.

The conversation is known as *la Encuentra*—the Encounter—has been handed down through the community of *Penitentes* for a half millennia. What is deeply moving though is that everyone assembled for this ritual knows this story by heart. Quite literally men and women, boys and girls carefully follow it, mouthing the words as they take on the roles in the conversation between Jesus and Mary.

Standing in heart of the village of Abiquiu one Holy Week, I realized that I was not just watching, but participating in something more than a Passion remembrance. I had become part of a larger human drama: the recollection and the re-ordering of relationship, whether between men and women, mothers and sons, sons and daughters.

Among the gathered were those who had returned home, some driving for up to two days. They came to be restored and revived in their relationships with each other and especially with their Mother, the Church and her Son, Jesus Christ, reclaiming their lives. At the conclusion of this drama, I turned and asked what this event was really about. One man could say, with tears falling from his eyes: “We need this story to keep us alive! It reminds us what it means to be family.” With that answer we fell to our knees, making our way to the cross; weeping with hearts full. Behind this scene, behind a wall in the ancient plaza in front of the parish church, there is a real grave marker proudly dedicated to the memory of their priest, who had died some years before ... of AIDS. His marker was here in this village because his ‘other’ family—not his parents—took him in when no one else would. “Woman, here is your son.” +Amen.

4. “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46)

When I speak these words or speak of them, I also recall when I first met a woman named Nesta at the Peace Train Tavern care center. The women there are living with HIV/AIDS, deep in the Valley of a Thousand Hills, South Africa. In her late 30s, yet looking more like late 70s or 80s, she was dying. Kaposi’s sarcoma had caused her legs to tortuously swell, making it very painful for her to walk the many kilometers needed to obtain food and water daily for her family.

Nesta was there to arrange for her own care. She was concerned about her two children—ages 10 and 13—who needed looking after. She also knew that she needed to take to bed and have a respite day of rest. The women gathered there, deciding daily who is able to offer care and who will receive care. It is a lottery of sorrow.

Weeping and in pain, Nesta agreed to let me take her home in the afternoon. When we reached an anonymous place in the road, she asked me to stop. We got out. Carrying her groceries down the steep embankment to her home (she would not let me help her) she said, “I appreciate this, but I am embarrassed for you to see where I live.” It was a mud hut with a locked door. Behind the door, a chair to sit on and a bed. Beside the hut a lean-to for cooking outside. I asked if we could pray a blessing on her home. Looking surprised she said, “Yes, I would like that very much, but first you must see my family.” I expected her children to appear from somewhere.

Instead, we went behind the dreary hut, and there, to my shock, were three mounded earthen graves, covered by thorn branches to keep the goats and wild dogs away. These were the

graves of her husband and two smaller children, aged 9 months and 27 months. I gasped in horror.

Nesta explained how she had to bury them under the cloak of darkness since she had no money to pay for real caskets. She revealed her shame as to how it looks in the community to be so poor. There was also the overriding fear of stigma because they had died of AIDS.

She told how her husband brought it—the virus—home from the mines in Johannesburg, four years earlier. How it killed her “new” children, and how it killed him. Now it was killing her. I stood, mute in the face of this suffering, for there are no words to penetrate such sorrow. Then I offered to bless each of the graves in her cemetery, to consecrate the earth and hallow it to sacred purposes, offering this place to God. Nodding, she agreed, whereupon she fell on the grave of her husband, beating the earth and crying out, “Where were you? Where were you?” I lifted her from the ground.

Then, falling into my arms sobbing and pounding my chest, she wept more openly, crying out as I held her, “Where were you? Where were you? Where were you?” I knew that she was asking something more. On behalf of all the women and children suffering from AIDS, all the men scorned, and all the children of God rejected because of AIDS the world over, she was asking something more of me, something of all of us!

“Where were you?”

“My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” he said that day on a cross. But on this day in that bare bones cemetery for a brief moment, there was, at least, a breast to beat upon, even if it was my own. +Amen.

5. “I thirst” (John 19:28)

Among the challenges of walking long distances is that one re-learns who one is and of what one is made. I am not merely talking about philosophy, values, or faith, but literally of one’s physical make-up. Science says that some 65 percent of our bodies are composed of water, the presence or absence of which grants or inhibits freedom of movement. Humans need at least two liters of water daily, just to survive. When walking, particularly with a backpack, up to six or even eight liters of water is critical: Not just for meeting the demands of intake, but to prevent blisters and the side effects of rapid dehydration.

Within days of commencing the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela I became aware of both my need for water and the abundance of it in village public fountains across northern Spain. For a thousand years, the local population had come to know that water is essential for the very survival of *peregrines* (pilgrims) and thereby had a solemn obligation to provide it when asked.

One a hot afternoon I found myself quite thirsty and very needy between towns. I had been walking alone for hours, realizing that I was also desperate for human companionship. This is where I learnt of the less spoken of tradition practiced in the dry places around the world: Offering hospitality to the stranger requesting water to drink. Building up courage out of sheer need I found my way to a door and asked “*Agua, por favor?*” “Water, please?”

Sybille, the person to whom I spoke was *not* a Spanish speaker, but a German *hospitalera*, a volunteer who assists pilgrims on the Camino, offering aid and comfort. The place to which I had gone was in fact an *albuerge*, a *refugio*—a place for sojourners, a place for lodging.

Listening, she exclaimed, “That is the worst Spanish I have ever heard. Where are you from?” I replied, “I am an American on my way home from South Africa.” Her eyes widened and without hesitation she said, “Welcome, Ted. We have been praying for your arrival. You are saying Mass for all the pilgrims here this evening.” Apparently, my cover had been revealed by a longtime friend who had walked several days faster than me.

I began drinking vast amounts of water to rehydrate, and learned about how to keep from becoming dehydrated for the rest of the pilgrimage: Drink more water. But I soon realized that I also needed to pay attention to my need for connection: for love and support on the road, as well. I found myself admitting my vocation rather than covering it up as I had planned on this “way of anonymity”. My response to the Gospel that night was, “Who is Christ for you on this road? What does he look like and what is he saying to you?” Sybille listened attentively that evening and in the years that have followed. Today, she is the Anglican chaplain to pilgrims coming to Santiago still inviting me to say Mass and be present to *peregrines* on the road.

Jesus said, “I thirst.” I suspect that it was not said to anyone particularly at Calvary that day, or even to God. It seems that He says this to all of us. “I thirst ... for your love!” You see it is evident that Christ thirsts for my love; but I have to ask, do I thirst for His? +Amen.

6. **“It is finished.”** (John 19:30)

As with everyone I have known in AIDS work, we each recall with utter clarity the time AIDS entered our lives: What we did or said as if it were yesterday. For me, more than three decades ago, when I ministered in a parish in Dallas, Texas, it began with Jerome, a 33-year-old man consumed by tuberculosis and cancer, bearing the blue and purple lesions of Kaposi’s sarcoma, often associated with AIDS.

He came to me with only one question, “May I die in your church?” Explaining that he had already been rejected by a half-dozen other churches, he was now placing his life in my hands. As I would learn nine months later at his committal service, he was then planning his suicide and was asking for exactly what he believed he wanted. Instead of suicide, though, he came to believe in life ... In the midst of his dying.

Throughout his time with us, Jerome challenged me, and through me the larger church, about everything from ritual practice to faith and theology to even the basics of caregiving. Not being a cradle-born Anglican, he said he came to us because there was something “beautiful” in the Anglican expression. Being rather ill, however, he couldn’t remember what that was. He did, however, appreciate and come to love the Eucharist. When he became homebound, he often asked to receive the Eucharist from my hand. I delighted in those moments, which seemed to bring him such comfort and peace.

When at last his body and spirit could take no more, he entered hospital to spend his last days. We arranged that I would bring him daily Eucharist and anoint him for the healing of body, mind and spirit. He was thrilled and remarked on being grateful. However, instead of dying

quickly it was a long slow five-week journey to his death. He dealt with horrific uncontrollable pain and deep psychic distress; the latter in particular due to the intransigence of his family who had refused to accept him and his dying.

Daily, he pulled himself together though to receive the bread and wine. As many do, he became introspective and even fearful. On one such day he asked, "Ted, how do I know when I have received my last Eucharist?" Taken aback by the question which belied his fear of dying without the grace of the church, I said, "Every Communion, every Eucharist, is our last."

We never talked of it again. Shortly thereafter he fell into a coma. Seven days later, I received an urgent call from the hospital to come for his last moments of life. I did come, and again to his unconscious body I offered Communion. Touching the host to his parched lips and then consuming it myself, his lips formed a gentle smile, and then said, "There Jerome; you have received your last Communion." Indeed, it was finished. Breathing his last, the tenuous grip on life left him. The result in the parish was that more than 150 other young men and women and children followed this same journey of AIDS in the next four years.

Since then, I have recounted this story around the world: Always the tears, the relief, the letting go. Always, the acceptance and that curious smile: Every Communion is our last! Indeed, "It is finished." +Amen.

7. **“Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit”** (Luke 23:46)

Why do we see this statement as a statement of the end? It is in fact a statement of trust: Jesus must be the one to finally let go of his life. As hard as it is for us to see and hear, it is also what each one of us must do at the end of our lives.

By the same token, the miracle of birth is, without doubt, a momentous and wondrous thing to which one cannot become inured. I have interviewed parents and doctors, nurses, and other health workers around the world, and each of them have stories of birth and wonder. I have my own.

I am a squeamish sort of guy. Even though I not a health expert, I have been working in public health for more than 20 years. I do know directly of the community work around the HIV pandemic and how to bring people together. Nonetheless, 37 years ago I participated in the birth of my first-born child, Deborah. Being modern, upbeat parents my wife Kaye and I readily agreed to actively participate in the birth together. We had a physician who was sensitive, wise, and acutely aware of the squeamishness of most fathers.

After an intensely long 18 hours of labor, Deborah was delivered safely and very sound. After some minutes of lying on her mother’s belly, the umbilical cord was tied as we waited for its pulse to stop, and for Deborah take up her own life. In the midst of this holy awesome silence, the doctor suddenly thrust out the scissors, saying, “Cut the cord.”

This was not in the script. There was no plan that had included this challenge. I recoiled in horror. “No way!” I stammered, my voice muffled through my face mask. He waited for a few moments and again, thrust the scissors into my face and said again, “Cut the cord.” One more

time I pulled back. This time he said, “Why?” “I can’t do that.” I protested. “I am not ready for that kind of involvement. It’s too bloody and ... And maybe it even hurts. No. I won’t do this.”

He waited again, and then a third time, this time extending the scissors slowly and speaking more gently, “Cut the cord, Ted.” I asked him again, “Why?” His response, both mystical and prophetic, resonates within my soul from that day to this. “You must cut the cord, because her mother’s task is to give her life, but yours is to give her freedom.”

And so it has been every day of every year since, giving her freedom has challenged me in ways I could not have imagined and still my first response is to recoil, to save her from the risk of pain, disappointment, or fear. The result is always the same. I relent and cut the cord, committing myself to the freedom that is hers, commending her into God’s hands.

For Jesus to cut his own cord from this world was his last act of freedom, and it is our invitation into that same kind of life. For him to cut the cord, was then, and is for us today, an affirmation of what or who we finally trust and how we trust. “Father into your hands I commend my spirit.” +Amen.

Sitting Shiva: A Service of Remembrance for Good Friday Evening

One of the hardest times to “come home” is when someone there has been a death. We feel the loss and then have to face all the might have beens or should have dones. But when we come home, the rules change.

The customs surrounding death and loss are as old as Judaism. Throughout the Hebrew scriptures, there are fleeting but important references to the facts of dying and the customs thereto. Job 2:13: *“They sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.”* (New Revised Standard Version Anglicized). That tradition of seven days is an outgrowth of the first mention in Torah, Genesis 50:10: *“When they came to the threshing-floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they held there a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he observed a time of mourning for his father for seven days.”* (NRSVA) This passage describes Joseph grieving over the death of his father, Jacob in the book of the prophet Amos (8:10): *“I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on all loins, and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.”* It establishes the necessity and legitimacy of grieving and of the necessary of grief being a solemn time

In the Jewish community, everyone gathers in the home of the bereaved to join the mourning. Food is brought in and shared, but not prepared by those who are bearing the loss. While it may appear that life is going on as usual, for the bereaved and the visiting mourners, there is just sorrow, however gently mingled with laughter at fond remembrances and tears for the lost moments never to be lived again. Coming home at the time of death is also deeply fulfilling. There is the shared sense of loss and the time for remembrance: to re-appropriate the

meaning of a life or re-acquaint one's self with the life of another, the beloved one. Even in the presence of other people there is time for the bereaved for silence, reflection, and consideration.

On this Good Friday evening we are gathered as a family. This time as a family Christians. Of mourners—We are the bereaved. There has been a death in the family. Our Lord has been brutally killed before our eyes, and an even more painful reality, he has been killed by the very institutions that support our very lives—the Church and the State. All he has done, which seems to be the offense, is invite us—*all* of us—to come home ... To God, to ourselves and to each other, regardless of what we may have done and regardless of who we are.

Somehow, we are told, this settles the score and balances creation. More to the point, though, the act of faithfulness and trust that Jesus is our model of the way forward living fully into the presence of God. Because we are standing some two millennia away from that moment, it is easy, almost *pro forma*, to rush towards Easter Day without coming to terms with the essential fact of his death. Jesus was laid in a grave. Without this fact, the promise of the Resurrection is not surprising, wonderful, or a gift which we are invited to receive.

As in all deaths there is shock at the loss, and a sense of unreality. Because he was a Jew, tonight we are doing Jews have done, we are observing the ritual of *shiva*, referred to by English-speaking Jews as “sitting *shiva*”.

The time of mourning begins with *shiva* (literally means in Hebrew: שבעה; seven); the seven-day period of grief and overt mourning. . During this period, mourners traditionally gather in the home of the bereaved and receive visitors. It is considered a great *mitzvah* (commandment) of kindness and compassion to pay a home visit to the mourners. Traditionally, no greetings are

exchanged and visitors wait for the mourners to initiate conversation. The mourner is under no obligation to engage in conversation and may, in fact, completely ignore the visitors.

There are various customs as to what to say when taking leave of the bereaved. One of the most common is to say: *Hamakom y'nachem etkhem b'tokh sha'ar avelei tziyon viyrushalayim* (“The Omnipresent will comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem“).

Depending on the community’s customs, others may also add such wishes as: “You should have no more *tza'ar* (‘pain’)” or “You should have only *simchas* (‘celebrations’)” or “we should hear only good news (*besorot tovot*) from each other” or “I wish you long life”.

Traditionally, prayer services are organized in the house of mourning. It is customary for the family to lead the services themselves. This is what we are doing this evening. We are sharing bits of stories or remembrances of the departed and looking to God for comfort and assurance, for support and promise.

In a few moments we will listen to the mourners speaking through hymns and words, through poetry and prophecy. As with sitting *shiva*, there are no greetings and no farewells. We are here to remember and honor the memory of the One who has passed—Jesus Christ—and yet, for us, it is always of awaiting his coming again. Thus it is that we are invited to enter the experience of loss, emptiness, and the dryness of this time so that our hearts and minds might be prepared to make our vigil early on Sunday morning, anticipating our Lord’s rising.

I invite you then to be at peace and to be still, as we gather our recollections – *Sitting shiva*.

Suggested resources for sitting shiva in a Good Friday remembrance service*1. At the House of Mourning (A prayer)*

“We are assembled with your friends in the shadow that fallen on our home. We raise our voices together in prayer to the source of life, asking for comfort and strength.

We need light when gloom darkens our home; to whom shall we look, but to the Creator of light? We need fortitude and courage when pain and loss assail us; where shall we find them, if not in the thought of Him who preserves all that is good destruction?

Who among us has not passed through trial and bereavements? Some bear fresh wounds in their hearts and therefore feel more keenly the kinship of sorrow. Others, whose days of mourning are more remote, still recall the comfort that sympathy brought to their sorrowing hearts.

All things pass; all that lives must die. All that we prize is but lent to us; and the time comes when we must surrender it. We are all travelers on the same road that leads to the same end.”

2. The Mourner's Prayer

“God, full of mercy, who dwells in the heights, provide a sure rest upon the Divine Presence's wings, within the range of the holy, pure and glorious, whose shining resemble the sky's, to the soul of (Hebrew name of deceased JESHUA) son of (Hebrew name of his father-JOSEPH) for a charity was given to the memory of his soul. Therefore, the Master of Mercy will protect him forever, from behind the hiding of his wings, and will tie his soul with the

rope of life. The Everlasting is his heritage, and he shall rest peacefully upon his lying place, and let us say: Amen”

(*Gates of Prayer New Union Prayerbook*, Central Conference of American Rabbis, New York, 1975.)

3. *A Simple Blessing*

Let us bless the well

eternally giving—

the circle of life

ever-dying, ever-living.

As we bless the wellspring of life

so are we blessed.

we carry it everywhere we go.

In sweet awakenings,

in our travels,

in our love talk,

when we are unaware,

forgotten in all the corners of our

being—

always with us.

And never heavy.

4. *In Everything (a poem)*

In everything, there is at least an

eighth

of death. It doesn't weigh much.

With what hidden, peaceful charm

(Leah Goldberg, p.196, *The Book of Blessings*, Marcia Falk, Harper, San Francisco, 1996)

5. *Hymn: My Song is Love Unknown*

Written in 1664. There is a setting I love in the American Episcopal Hymnal* that is elegant and quite singable. (https://hymnary.org/text/my_song_is_love_unknown)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1. My song is love unknown,
My Savior's love to me;
Love to the loveless shown,
That they might lovely be.
O who am I, that for my sake
My Lord should take, frail flesh and die?</p> | <p>Then "Crucify!" is all their breath,
And for His death they thirst and cry.</p> |
| <p>2. He came from His blest throne
Salvation to bestow;
But men made strange, and none
The longed for Christ would know:
But O! my Friend, my Friend indeed,
Who at my need His life did spend.</p> | <p>4. Why, what hath my Lord done?
What makes this rage and spite?
He made the lame to run,
He gave the blind their sight,
Sweet injuries! Yet they at these
Themselves displease, and 'gainst Him
rise.</p> |
| <p>3. Sometimes they strew His way,
And His sweet praises sing;
Resounding all the day
Hosannas to their King:</p> | <p>5. They rise and needs will have
My dear Lord made away;
A murderer they saved,
The Prince of life they slay,
Yet cheerful He to suffering goes,
That He His foes from thence might free.</p> |

6. In life, no house, no home

My Lord on earth might have;

In death no friendly tomb

But what a stranger gave.

What may I say? Heav'n was His home;

But mine the tomb wherein He lay.

7. Here might I stay and sing,

No story so divine;

Never was love, dear King!

Never was grief like Thine.

This is my Friend, in whose sweet praise

I all my days could gladly spend.

Note on the Hymn Writer

Samuel Crossman (1623–1683), the writer of this hymn, earned a Bachelor of Divinity at Pembroke College, Cambridge, and was Prebendary of Bristol. After graduation, he ministered to both an Anglican congregation at All Saints, Sudbury, and to a Puritan congregation as well. Crossman sympathized with the Puritan cause, attending the 1661 Savoy Conference, which attempted to update the *Book of Common Prayer* so both Puritans and Anglicans could use it. The conference failed, and the 1662 Act of Uniformity expelled some 2,000 ministers from the Church, including Crossman. He recanted shortly thereafter, and was ordained in 1665, becoming a royal chaplain. He received a post at Bristol in 1667, and became Dean of Bristol Cathedral in 1683. Crossman's works include *The Young Man's Meditation, or Some Few Sacred Poems upon Select Subjects, and Scriptures* (London: J. H. & c., 1664)

+++ Using the materials above and many others selected by a team of clergy and lay person follows a 30-50 minute service created by the community which may include a selection of hymns and songs, readings from literature and poetry which enlighten and comfort in the face of death and loss. The aim of this event is to identify with the real loss that the death of Jesus brings. Thus allowing us to enter the wonderful mystery of the Resurrection three days hence. +++

Easter Evensong Service

We have reached the end of our Holy Week pilgrimage ... Our journey home. The lesson this evening has us on the road again. What would you do? What would you do after having your hopes and dreams dashed? Your hero, leader, teacher or guide destroyed before your very eyes? Even now, there is more confusion. His tomb is reportedly empty. Some say he has been seen. "But who knows? It's all so confusing and so improbable." No, it is impossible. The dead don't rise.

To those who saw and heard him, and followed him, they believed the redemption of Israel was at hand. They were all part of the Messianic story. But His death and the destruction of all that is good; no, it's impossible. They did what was normal. They started towards their own homes. Home, being that place where at least they understood the wind, the seasons, the lake and the movement of fishes in the Sea of Galilee; home being familiar, normal, routine. "Home is the place where, when you have to go there/They have to take you in." (Robert Frost, "Death of Hired Man")

His name was Pascal, literally meaning the lamb. We met on the road to Santiago. He was a bit of an anomaly in that he was not sure there was a religious meaning or value to being on the road. But he had made this promise to God, though not being sure about God, when he was critically injured when in a car crash into his bicycle six months before. He reported, "I will say thank you in Santiago, if you let me walk again." So here he was walking. His doctors said that he was paralyzed and would never walk again when admitted to hospital. For weeks nothing happened. He was hopeless. All at once he felt tingling in his limbs and started moving. After a

time, he proceeded into physical therapy, learning how to walk again. The medical staff was amazed.

Now he was on the road, sidling up to me, he said, "I've heard from other *peregrinos* that you are a priest, so tell me about Jesus." And there began a sporadic but intense conversation which ranged over the next 30 days. He would be two or three days ahead of me and then re-appear. After conversing intently he would wander off again. And so it went.

When I arrived, at last, in Santiago he found me sitting in a cafe on the street called the "the way of the Spirit," the meaning not lost on me. He said, "I want to know who you know." Not sure of what he meant I asked him to repeat the question: "I want to know who you know ... You know, Jesus." "Sure, you can know him and I believe you do," I said and he admitted that it was true. "So I want to be baptized by you tonight." Startled, I asked him why. "Because everyone knows that when you are talking about Jesus, he's right there with you. In fact, some of us agree that it is really him talking. If you know him that well and baptism is a sign that I have come to accept him, then it is what is required to complete the relationship. So you must baptize me," he added.

As Jesus' followers walked to Emmaus, he came right up alongside them. Whether it was their disillusionment that kept their eyes blinded, or the depth of grief in their hearts, or the sheer fact that he was transformed by the Resurrection; it is hard to say. They engaged him in their conversation, a conversation about the wonderful and horrific events of the past week.

Gently chiding, perhaps, he responded as the Church will always respond: Telling the age-old story from the sacred texts, in this case from the Prophets, of how the Messiah would

suffer and die. Still not believing, but fascinated by the acuity of his teaching, they listened harder. Did their hearts pound faster at the sound of his voice, or to the force of his words? We know not, but still they could not allow themselves to believe that it was really Jesus. So they discussed and observed and perhaps even hoped a bit that maybe ... The story wasn't over.

As evening was approaching they beckoned him to join in a light meal. They moved from being wrapped in their own grief opening their lives enough to share a meal with each other and with this stranger. For a brief moment, they moved out of the isolation of their grief to share their lives at table. It happens for someone this way every time we gather.

Was it now they knew who it was? It doesn't seem so from the story, but who knows? What did happen when they sat at table was that He blessed and broke the bread; blessed and poured the wine. In that moment of blessing and breaking, blessing and pouring, they knew: This was Jesus! And in that moment He disappears from their eyes!

Then the re-collection begins; "Didn't our hearts burn?"

He comes to the grieving and brokenhearted. He comes to the fearful and oppressed. He comes among us as one to whom our eyes have often been blinded. So how will we know him? How will we recognize that God is doing something new and wonderful in our lives?

May I suggest some questions that can guide us to making an Easter discipline and hold the wonder of this day?

- Remember and share who is the most influential person in your life.
- Remember and share when you first believed in God, in life, or in anything at all.

- Remember and share when you disappointed yourself and the one (or ones) who loved you.
- Remember and share what it is like to be in love.

Earlier today when we re-affirmed our baptismal vows, we recalled the times of our faithfulness and faithlessness; the shame and the sorrow; the love and the passion—And offered it all before God, who will restore us to something of great value.

When midnight came, there was Pascal with a whole crowd of *peregrines* (pilgrims) from the Camino at the Great Fountain. Carrying candles and singing, they stood around us while I asked him to renounce evil, and pledge his loyalty to the Christian community. Three times I poured water in the name of the God the Creator, Christ the Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit, the Sustainer. Anointing him with holy oil, secured from one of the priests in the Cathedral, I made the sign of the cross on his forehead sealing him as Christ's own forever. Shaking with delight in the full thrall of exuberance, everyone threw water from the fountain on one another in what became a rollicking water fight in Cathedral Plaza.

At the Pilgrim's Mass the next day, there was Pascal, receiving his first Eucharist as a baptized Christian. On the way back to his seat, he leaned over to me and said, "Thank you. You know, Jesus was with us last night, throwing water as much as you were. Now I know him. I am grateful you got out of the way for me to talk with him on the road. You have modeled how we all need to get out of the way. Thank you."

And with that he disappeared into the crowd in the Cathedral. I never saw him again. But I discovered that a longtime prayer was finally answered; that I could be transparent enough to

get out of the way for others to see Jesus. Pascal was on a journey of thanksgiving; instead he found the faith for which he longed and had a direct experience of the living Christ. Isn't that what many of us are seeking?

The wonder of the Resurrection on this day is that the Christ, who is unearthed today, is the one unearthed in my soul. The Living God who conquers death today, is the God who calls each of us into the heaven or hell of our personal lives, and into the life of a community built on his body and his blood. The rooted-ness of this mystery is in the claim that it makes upon my life and yours and how and why each of us will appropriate it.

The Spirit is blowing through us calling us into something new. We—pilgrims all—have been caught in the drama of renewing his life by renewing ours. Tomorrow we go to the four winds and scatter again to our separate ministries and callings. But for now we are reminded that we can see him in the breaking of the bread, and we can hear him in the Word. And touch him by touching one another.

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

The Lord is Risen, indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

+Amen.