

Sermon by The Rev. E. Perren Hayes

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I Cor 15:3,8: *"I handed on to you the tradition I had received....Last of all he appeared to me too; it was like a sudden, abnormal birth."*

Perhaps the greatest challenge to a preacher is how to present the ancient truth of the Gospel to modern people. Ancient catholic truth must be repackaged so that it is not only intelligible, but also attractive to modern people. This is indeed a difficult undertaking.

There are, in fact, many people who choose to "cop out" on this matter; they act and preach as if there has been no history, no advance in learning, since the earliest days of the Church. This is part of the literalist view of the Bible -- a real cop out if there ever was one!

My friends, we believe in a God who acts in history. It is essential that we make use of ALL that God has given us as we bring the gospel to the people of our time. This means all the new knowledge that has come about in our time; the new means of study; the re-interpretations that arise from the implications of philosophy, psychology and science; questions of sexual orientation; democracy, freedom and justice; intergalactic as well as subatomic physics; microbiology and all the rest of it. ALL HAS BEEN GIVEN by the God who made it all. This God has shared his life with us SO THAT WE CAN SEARCH OUT these elements of truth and know God better. All knowledge comes from the God who, in addition to being the great Creator of all that is, our God ALSO IS TRUTH -- not the God OF Truth, but God IS Truth itself. There is, and there can be, only ONE truth.

This means is that our understanding of Reality, our understanding of God, our understanding of our relationship to God and our understanding of our relationship to each other, yes even our understanding of the Church, is, and must be, constantly changing. It must always change; and it will always change; our understanding of reality cannot be constant. God cannot change, for God is BEING. But we are NOT God. Yes, we are enriched by the life of God in us; we share in the creative activity of God; we make decisions that affect who we are and how we live. We do it BECAUSE God's life is in us. In fact, we can know God in our day only as we incorporate new understandings of truth into our lives. As we change - and each day changes us - as we change, our idea of God must also change.

The greatest aspect of Creation is that God has so greatly honored us by giving us mind, reason and will. Therefore, not only can we know ABOUT God; we actually share in the very process that is fundamental to the activity of God. We make moral decisions. We can experience God's creation only through our five senses -- this came up in a science class last week where I was acting as a substitute teacher. We experience God's creation only through our five senses -- we then process this information through our mind, reason

and will. We react to these feelings by developing feelings about it. Then we make a decision on how to act. This process is the specific characteristic of humanity; it is this that makes us different from the rest of that portion of God's creation that we currently know. To the extent that we fail to process, to that extent we fail to be human. And as we learn more, it will affect us as we process our experiences with the five senses through our mind, reason and will, turning them into feelings or emotions. Thus not only each era, but each day, presents us with new and greater challenges to make wise decisions under God.

I am convinced that St. Paul is saying exactly that in the epistle for this morning. Listen: "My friends, I must remind you of the Gospel that I preached to you; the gospel which you received, on which you have taken your stand, and which is NOW bringing you salvation. Remember the terms in which I preached the Gospel to you - for I assume that you hold it fast and that your conversion was not in vain. First and foremost, I handed on to you the tradition I had received: that [the Messiah] died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised to life on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Kephias, and afterward to the twelve...Last of all he appeared to me too; it was like a sudden, abnormal birth....by God's grace I am what I am, and his grace has not proved in vain....This is what we all proclaim, and this is what you believed."

This is one of the earliest forms of the Creed. It is the foundation stone of the Church. Please note where it begins. The very first thing it says is that Jesus is the Messiah of God had promised: and that the Messiah died. He was buried, and he rose on the third day. And he appeared. HE APPEARED ALIVE! He is seen as a CURRENT EVENT. Last of all, says St Paul, LAST OF ALL HE APPEARED TO ME TOO IT WAS LIKE A SUDDEN, ABNORMAL BIRTH. A WHOLE NEW BEGINNING. Everything started all over again, because Messiah/Jesus appeared to Paul. And so it is, says Paul, with the Corinthians: "You too have taken your stand on this Gospel, this Good News." Please notice that there is no mention in Paul of Jesus son of Mary. His concern is with the Jesus of NOW -- revealed as the Messiah -- the Son of God. But who is he, really?

In the lecture to the Hebrews we read: "Therefore the Messiah had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he might be merciful and faithful as their high priest before God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. Because he himself has passed through the test of suffering, he is able to help those who are in the midst of their test."

Now we come to Jesus! He lives just like me; he has the same temptations I have; he has the same pleasures I have; he rejoices as I rejoice; he weeps as I weep; only, unlike me, he does not sin. Listen! Because he was tempted to adultery as I may be; because he was tempted to over drink or use drugs as I may be; because he was tempted to impatience as I may be; AND HE DID NOT SIN, therefore I know that my redeemer lives; I know he is victorious where I fail. He is right here with me: right NOW. He is my present reality; he is right here with me as I am tempted. I love him for that; passionately I love him for that; and in my passion I attach myself to him, and allow his passion for me to fill me, to

consume me, to energize me with that same love which he showed when he died for me. And just as Jesus emptied himself of his Godly nature to become like you and me, so also I need to empty myself of my nature: then I shall be just a tiny bit of the reflection of that same Jesus to those around me.

I care only that God, FROM God; Light, FROM Light; true God, FROM true God HE takes flesh of the Virgin Mary and becomes exactly like me; I care only that he loves me so much that he is willing to die for me; and when the Holy Trinity raised him from the Dead, it was not so that I could venerate his sandals or glory in his miracles, or some other aspect of his history; NO! it was so that I can know BEYOND THE SHADOW OF A DOUBT, that I live in a world, in a universe that is governed by love. When I live in terms of that love, no matter what happens to me, NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS TO ME, I shall be at peace, because Jesus lives with me NOW. And on that basis I move forward daily.

We live here and now; we live in a world racked with pain and anguish war and hunger and racism and anger and indifference; yet we live in a world where we can make a real difference. You see, we have one very specific advantage: we have Jesus. So when events and information come into our bodies through the five senses, and we take it and process it with our mind and reason and will and make our moral decisions on how we will live our lives, we have two things going for us. First, we have Jesus with us now; that tells us that no matter what the decision may be, we can cope with it. Second, we have the clear standard of the church also with us; the experience of Paul and all the others before us, summarized in the Creeds. We burnish our decisions with the steel wool of the Creeds. They tell us that God, the One who made it all: that God is next to us; with us; in us; and our lives reflect God's life. "By God's grace I am what I am, and I have out performed them all - no not really; it is only the grace of God who works in me at all times."

What a wondrous consolation it is to know that our Redeemer lives, and has come through the same temptations we have, and his triumph assures our own victory.

Praise the Lord!

Perren

There is nothing that you can do that will ever make God stop loving you.