

AS ONE UNKNOWN

April 4, 2010

Text -- Isaiah 25: 6-9

Mark 16: 1-8

“He comes to us as One unknown, without a name ... as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word (he used of old), ‘Follow me,’ and sets before us the tasks which He has to fulfill in our time. He commands and to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He reveals Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they pass through in His fellowship. It is an ineffable mystery that we only learn, through our own experience of following Him, Who He is.”¹

They are the words of Albert Schweitzer. He describes one of the deepest meanings of this day.

“He comes to us as One unknown ...” That is how the Risen Christ came on the first Easter, isn't it? Mary Magdalene supposed him to be a gardener (John 20: 14-15). The two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus thought him a stranger (Luke 24: 13-31). Saul of Tarsus experienced him as a blinding light which forced him to his knees on the road to Damascus (Acts 9: 3-5).

“As One unknown, without a name...” Schweitzer says; *“as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those who knew Him not.”* So it was two thousand years ago; so it still is today.

I've said it before and I shall say it again and again – **The proof of the resurrection does not lie in the past but in the present.** Search history though you will ... avail yourself of modern scholarship ... probe the scriptures to their depths ... you will not find the irrefutable confirmation you seek.

Albert Schweitzer's life is testimony to that. He established an international reputation as a theologian in 1906 with the publication of his book, The Quest of the Historical Jesus. He was already famous as a musician and musicologist, and he was only 31 years old. A year later, he

enrolled in medical school. In 1913, at the age of 38, he went to French Equatorial Africa as a medical missionary. He set up a hospital where he cared for some 2000 patients during his first year of work. He spent the next 52 years in that service.

“He comes to us as One unknown ...” this musician turned theologian turned surgeon later wrote. *“He speaks to us the same word (he used of old), ‘Follow me,’ and sets before us the tasks which He has to fulfill in our time.”* This is the way it works. The proof of the resurrection does not lie in the past, nor is it waiting for us somewhere far off in the future. It is here, *“wherever two or three gather in His name,”* or it is nowhere. He comes to us where we live, unexpectedly, as a gift; that’s why we call this “the present.”

David Livingstone was another pioneer of our faith. Born in Scotland in 1813, he too became a medical missionary in Africa, first visiting there when he was 28 years old. He was known as a great explorer, and as a pioneer in the abolition of the slave trade. At one point, he wrote back to the London Missionary Society (his sponsoring agency) and said, “I need some men and women to come down and help.” They replied, “We have men and women to come and help. Just tell us where the roads are and we will send them to you.” Livingstone wrote back: “Please hear this. I need men and women to come to places where there are no roads because there are none here.”

There are still places like that in the world – places where there are no roads. You don’t have to go to Africa to find them ... or Asia ... or Latin America. They are places of the heart, and of the soul, and of the mind. Western civilization is in decay, Albert Schweitzer contended more than half a century ago, because it lacks the will to love. We must develop a philosophy based on “reverence for life,” he argued, on the inspiration to love and embrace with compassion all forms of life. There are no roads to that place, but isn’t it a place to which the Risen Christ still calls us?

Here's another place. It may not sound like much at first blush. Ask me to solve the problem of world hunger, or put an end to warfare and ethnic violence. Point me to the challenge of global warming or the HIV / AIDS epidemic that is still ravaging the planet. There are no clearly marked road maps to any of them, and Christ surely wants us to conquer each and every one. But . . . But

Alongside all of them, doesn't the call to live our lives with absolute moral integrity also ring true? Isn't it the first and highest calling of every one of us? You can dress it up in religious language. "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" For two thousand years that has stood the test of time, but it has not therefore put an end to the scandals of abuse and corruption which still fill the airways and newspapers of our day.

Live your life with absolute moral integrity. You know what that means as well as I do. It means don't lie. It means don't cheat. Not on your taxes. Not in your marriage. Not in your work place. It means treat every person you meet with respect and kindness. It means keep your own ego in check. When you give your word, keep it. If it is within your ability to make someone else's life even just a little bit easier, do it. When someone hurts you – and they will, make no mistake –, try to forgive them. And when you hurt someone – and you will, let's be clear . . . we are all more human than otherwise –, try to forgive yourself, even as God in Christ has forgiven us all.

A life of moral integrity . . . It is within the reach of every one of us here. I will not end world hunger in my life, or put a stop to war or suffering. I have tried and continue still to do what I can with my time and my talents and my treasure, but these are tasks beyond my reach. But this human life which I've been given . . . This "me" that I am . . . This I can and must be responsible for.

“He comes to us as One unknown, without a name ... as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word, ‘Follow me,’ and sets before us the tasks which He has to fulfill in our time.” Surely a life lived with absolute moral integrity is one of them. *“He commands and to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He reveals Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they pass through in His fellowship. It is an ineffable mystery that we only learn, through our own experience of following Him, Who He is.”*

You don’t have to travel anywhere to experience this resurrection promise. It is not in the past nor in the future. It is here – a gift called “the present.” May you receive that gift this day.
Happy Easter.

1 . Albert Schweitzer, The Quest for the Historical Jesus, p. 401; 1906.