

The Second Sunday of Easter
The Rev. Patricia Millard

4-15-07

Acts 5:27-32

Psalms 118:19-24

Revelation 1:4-8

John 20:19-31

As I was looking at our readings for today, one of the things that struck me was the sense of beginnings and endings. In our reading out of the Book of Revelation, we read that Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. In our Gospel this morning John has this story that we are very familiar with, the story of Thomas and the giving of the Holy Spirit in the context of the Gospel of John. But the part of the story that really compels me today is, again, the end. This very last passage in which he speaks about how the Spirit is given and these things are said so that all may believe that Jesus is, in fact, the Messiah and in believing all may have life in his name. If we think about it this theme of life moves through the Gospel of John like a golden thread. It mirrors that statement in the prolog which we all know and love so well: *“In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.”* And then the story continues to say that Jesus was coming through the world and in Him was life and the life was the light of all peoples.

One of the questions that I have as we enter into this season of Easter is this celebration of life and especially today as we celebrate, Lillian, your one hundredth birthday among us. It is a wonderful and happy day. And by the way we are going to be celebrating and Lillian is going to be celebrating not only today, but I understand there are birthday celebrations the entire week. So really it's her birthday week and well deserved.

But as I reflect on this occasion that we have woven into today, the second Sunday in the season of Easter, I find myself reflecting on some interesting contrasts between the Liturgical season of Lent and the Liturgical season of Easter. Think with me. All of us, if asked, what do we do to observe Lent, have a list that comes out in an instant, just like that: *Repentance, giving up, reflection, meditation.* Or these images come easily: *Walking with Jesus on the way to Jerusalem, walking with Jesus and accompanying Jesus at the foot of the cross.* These images are specific; the earthly Jesus and the story of the earthly Jesus and the images of the Passion and of the death of Jesus are engraved in our common mind.

Now when we turn to images of Easter, things get very interesting and they change. Those of you, like me, who have had any experience of illustrating bulletins for the season of Easter, or those of you who might be illustrating Easter in academic or formation settings, might notice how we move from having crosses and crowns of thorns and things that we can really see and imagine, to images that suddenly become very abstract. Have you noticed that in the bulletins you can buy from publishing houses how they come in full color? For Easter you get something like a full rainbow or a sunrise or an empty something -- we're not quite sure what it is, we just know that it's empty. And that sense of abstractness and emptiness and not knowing quite what to do with it feeling, pervades imagery of the early part of the Easter season.

Perhaps even more problematic, were I to ask you: *What do you do to observe the liturgical season of Easter?* Well, if you're on the Altar Guild, I know exactly what you do, you're very happy that Lent is over and you just go "whoosh", we're done with that. And if you are a lot of rank and file, you have served Easter by staying home. Today is typically the lowest attendance Sunday of the year and so we call it "Low Sunday". The first Sunday in this most glorious season is Low Sunday. And those of us who have parents would answer: *Well the way that we observe Easter is that we spend the whole week chasing after our children who have been on a week-long sugar high and picking up candy wrappers.* I certainly have had my share of discovering candy wrappers in kind of hidden behind things so that my children think I won't notice how much candy they really got.

But if we think about it, what do we do communally, formationally, to observe the liturgical season of Easter? We know that it is that season that commemorates that pivotal part of the gospel story, but what do we do? If we answer the question truthfully, our answer is "not much." I think of all the liturgical seasons, Easter is the season that we are less intentional in observing, less careful in reflecting on, and the fault my brothers and sisters is not yours, the fault is ours in the sense that those of us who are Elders and Teachers – and I mean the church broadly, not just St. Wilfrid's – fault us as a community in not being intentional in forming ourselves as a community around the observance of Easter, as a liturgical season and the Resurrection as an exemplar for how to live the Christian life. So how do we do this? How do we live in the resurrection? How do we observe the season of Easter? Now the good news is that we are not a community that is lacking in wisdom and we are not a community that is lacking in Saints. So today I am just struck by how our very community begins to give us the answer. And we have, in you, Lillian, in your life and in the example that all of us can take in having you amongst us.

Lillian was born in England on April the 17th of 1907. So I found myself thinking, what other interesting people, not as interesting as you but interesting people none the less, share a birth year with you. I was interested to know that Frida Kahlo, a Mexican painter, was born in 1907, and since I was born in Mexico and have been interested in her art since before she was famous, I thought that was very cool. But then I thought, I'm in Orange County and most people here will not be as interested as I am in Frida Kahlo, so for the rest of us 1907 is also the birth year of John Wayne. OK, a few more interesting 1907 things. For those of us who are interested in education, as Lillian was/is, and many of us are, Maria Montessori opened her first Montessori school in Rome on January 6th of 1907. On February 13th of that same year, English suffragettes stormed the British Parliament and 60 women were arrested. In March, Finland became the first European country to give women the right to vote. And on April 17th, Lillian's date of birth, on that very same day, 11,745 immigrants arrived in Ellis Island, New York. Now things were looking up in June because the automatic washer and dryer were introduced for the first time. Unfortunately that was such a positive step for women that life had to kind of balance things out, so later in June, Norway began to restrict women's voting rights. For those of us interested in scouting, in July 1907 Sir Robert Baden-Powell formed Boy Scouts in England; I thought that was interesting because I was a Girl Guide Leader in Mexico. And, in September, for those of us in the Episcopal Church, construction began on Washington's National Cathedral. And for all of us in these beautiful United States, December 31, 1907, for the first time a ball drops at Times Square to signal the new year. So 1907, by any stretch, by any lens, was a grand year and you had it in great company.

But the question stays with us, *how do we observe life?* It's at the end of the gospel in John that we are invited to step into life, and at the beginning, the same gospel writer invites us into life. What does this life look like? A few weeks ago, working with the baptismal preparation class, one of the things we talked about was that the Christian life ought to be so different from life as usual out in the rest of the world, that people ought to be able to look at this community and see something radically different. And our experience as Christians ought to be so different from the experience of life out there without Christ that we should be unable to imagine living without Christ. In the first letter of Peter there is this sentence that captures that sentiment very well. Its this little sentence, kind of put in the middle, that in a sense mirrors our Collect for the day: *Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you. Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's body may show forth in their lives what they profess with their faith.* What does a life lived and transformed by Christ look like? Well, again, I found myself reflecting on Lillian's life and the example's that she had and the example she is for us.

A couple of weeks ago Lillian met with Michael Slater -- many of us know Michael, he is a Deacon and was ordained here, and is known to us. He had a conversation with her and then shared some of that conversation with me and today I share with you. When Lillian was a little girl, her earliest memory is one of having her photograph taken along with her baby brother. Lillian remembers how in those days it took a long time to set up the picture and the whole process meant being still, for what must have seemed for a two-year old, like the longest time. So her father lent her his whistle to help her be still and she remembers how at the end at that time that was so very special, she didn't want to give the whistle back. Now Lillian's sense of courage and expansiveness and traveling and embracing a life began to manifest itself at an early age, and by the time she was five she knew that she wanted to be a Doctor and that she wanted to be a Missionary in Africa when she grew up. That sense of traveling was already there. Lillian graduated from High School at 17 and then wanted to go on to University, but in spite of all of the advances that were being made in women's rights at the time, she still got caught in the age when limited educational resources tended to go to the boys first, so her initial plans didn't get as affirmed as she would have liked them to be but Lillian is never one to let a parent obstacle keep her from moving forward into living fully. So in 1925 she spent a year as a student teacher and then at 18 she went to St. Gabriel's College in South London where she did continue with her studies. Of course she showed great potential and had no trouble finding a teaching position, and at the beginning of her second year of teaching the school inspector asked her to go to a new school that was being built and she taught there for 16 years. Then she was offered the Headship at St. Saviour's Church of England Primary School for children and those of you who work in schools know that old schools might be a problem because facilities are always an issue. That was an issue for Lillian as well, but she rose to the challenge again and when she first went there, February of 1948, that one-room school had 79 students. Twenty-four years later when Lillian retired in 1972, she had administered over 300 students in a brand new school building. Upon retirement, Lillian began her life for which we know her most today, which is one of staying very very busy and traveling all over the world.

One other lovely part of Lillian's life is that when she was 72 years old, Lillian got married for the first and only time. For many years after that she and her husband Max traveled together and

had a beautiful relationship until his death. So as we see, in telling this, both Lillian and we have a lot to celebrate as we honor this life, as we honor these 100 years. And the other gift that you bring us is an example of how we can live lives that are filled with expansiveness, filled with courage, and filled with joy.

As I reflect on my own life I know that that is not a given. In fact, I think of stories in my own family where some of the people and the generations that have gone before me have, like Lillian, embraced life as long as they are given years to live. But there are also people in my family who at an earlier age kind of checked out of life, stopped living in some form or another. Part of the formation of my growing years was watching what it looked like when people that I cared about checked out of life a little bit too soon. I remember a Great Uncle (my father's uncle), for example, who when he was a young man apparently did a lot of things, but when he got older he got frightened of life or something and so he bought this little property in Lytle, Texas, this itty bitty tiny town, and for the next 30 or 40 years proceeded to die one day at a time and his life became itty bitty tiny and small. Fear covered those years and that affected other people in the family. For example, I know that my Great Uncle made a pact with his neighbor. They didn't want some strange person to go and live on those two properties that were next to each other and so they arranged this thing with a Lawyer that which ever one of them died first, the other one would have control as to who could live on that property, in that house. And what that led to, since people are always arguing and fighting if you're not awfully careful, is that when my great uncle died, it just so happened that his nephew, my uncle (my father's brother) and his wife (my Aunt) were living with him but they didn't get along with the neighbor. So that neighbor soon after my great uncle's death, kicks them out of the house and they have been homeless ever since living with my cousins.

When we check out of living it affects not only our own selves but those around us. And the seeds of whether we are going to live expansive lives or lives that become overwhelmed by darkness and by fear, I think are planted at a much much earlier age. In fact, as I think on my own life I think of my thirties (I'm am past my thirties now) as the time when I see myself allowing dispositions that either lead to a life of expansiveness or a life that will end in darkness and in fear. Now part of this I know is temperament. Some people have exuberant, outgoing, joyful, courageous temperament, and some of us don't have temperaments that are quite that expansive and I'm one of them. I tend to live little and not live big. My sister is the one who lives big and so she is the one out doing things and thinking everything is wonderful and I have to work a little harder at that. So I know that a lot of what helps us move into the decade has to do with fate, or circumstance, or family, or personality and temperament, but there is one more piece, maybe the most important piece.

If we connect to the beginning of this reflection, *what does it mean to be an Easter people? What does it mean to live informed by the Resurrection the love and the light of Christ?* If we are to really reflect on observances for Easter we would do well to reflect on Jesus as the one who enables, equips, guides us and graces us to live fully. To live like Lillian has, to live big and to live well. In Jesus our tendency to become little or small or dark or frightened can be transformed. In Jesus the wounds and the pains or the sins and the suffering that can affect our lives and lead us to anger or fear or bitterness or resentment or regret, can be transformed into forgiveness, expansiveness, light, and love. My invitation for all of us as we celebrate Lillian's

100 years is that in Jesus all of us may know many many other 100 years lived well. That our practices for the season of Easter might become practices of embracing life, ways of embracing love, ways of discovering courage, ways of becoming free from anger or resentment or fear or darkness or any of those dispositions of the soul that would impede us from living fully and living well. That's the yearly, and indeed the daily, invitation of the season of Easter, the daily grace of Jesus the Christ. The daily task of the Christian life might be how we as individuals and as a community live lives that are so filled with love, with light, with joy and with expansiveness, that at their end we may give thanks for them with enormous gratitude and joy. And from the outside people may look at us, a Christian community, and see how in Jesus everything is made different, everything is infused with light, and everything is transformed by love.

Amen