

This is the Fifth Sunday of Easter, and Easter is the season of resurrection; that is: all that Jesus continues to teach us, following his death on the cross - Easter is all about expanding/stretching our understanding of what life is; Easter is all about the insistence and assurance of eternal life, the real yet-somehow-differently-embodied life that truly is; Easter is all about why this should and must change the way we think about life, one another, and the world we live in. What are the fears that distort our relationships, in what way are we trapped or limited by habits of judgement, anger, envy, or greed? How profoundly does fear, and fear of death impact our life? It's questions like these that I believe the resurrected Jesus gives us answers to ... the assurance of eternal life in God is a pathway into freedom and fullness of life from all the things that bind us to the death-culture of this world, culture and habits of being that would have us forget the glory of God, the expansive, exquisite and mysterious truth of the cosmos, of which we each are a powerful and crucial part.

Death is the thing that ultimately stands in opposition to life, and Jesus' resurrection crushes the power that death might otherwise have over us.

It's easy to say these words, I realize, but it's not always so easy to know, full-body-know, the truth of them ... and this, I believe, is why we follow Jesus on The Way. Christianity is, I believe, a Way of living and being, a 'journey' to ever increasing freedom and fullness of life, justice, peace; and it's a journey we each must take for ourselves, as our own life stories are entirely unique.

The Christian Way calls us to process, interpret, integrate our encounters and experiences, our pasts, our struggles, and our joys,

and all that is *of the world*, to make sense of all this through the lens of faith, through the lens of being ‘on the Way,’ only then can we begin to come to any kind of understanding, can our minds begin to be opened.

I recently came across a parable, written by Jesuit priest Anthony DeMello, I think it underpins this point, so I’m going to share with you. Maybe some of you have heard it before, it’s called The Explorer:

One day, an adventurous individual leaves their village to explore the mysterious, and distant Amazon. When he gets back from his trek, his fellow villagers are rapt with attention as he attempts to explain his incredible experience, especially the beauty of the remarkable place he visited, the scale of it, the experience of being there, the impact it had on him. He quickly realizes he’s *struggling* to convey his experience in a way that it can be understood, and so he draws a map, and tells his friends to follow the map and go there themselves. The villagers adore this map, they study each and every detail, they copy it so they can each have one, they regularly gather and discuss the map, and soon they consider themselves experts on the Amazon because they have come to know the map so very well.

In our own context, perhaps this goes some way to explaining why so many folks who consider themselves, identify themselves as Christian, still seem to organize life around death, through violence, still see the world and organize it in ways that bring harm to so many, and exclude, and terrorize so many.

These folks read and know the Bible, many have extensively read and studied Christian theologies of all kinds, and they will use Scripture, the Scripture that ‘they know so well,’ or the tradition of the church as they understand it, or words from theologians they can quote,

they use all these as weapons. They don't seem to be taking the journey, they seem to have forgotten about the journey, instead they consider themselves righteous and certain, because of how well they know 'the map.'

In a world where we know the map really well, but don't take the journey, lots of things seem entirely reasonable: it seems reasonable to classify a small group of white, landowning Afrikaners as refugees, who should be fast-tracked and resettled here in this country,¹ over those living in active war zones or displaced from their homes because of war. The list of those who desperately need refuge is long ... heart-braking-ly long.

To people who aren't using the map so they can take the journey of faith, making sense of the world like this, organizing their thinking like this makes "perfect sense," and they're certain they're doing the right thing.

This is the only way for me to make sense of Christians who consider what's happening in Gaza (53,000 lives lost) to be reasonable, book bans and book burnings to be reasonable, flag bans, deportations without due process, cuts to essential social services like SNAP and Medicaid, the imposition of gender onto an individual to be reasonable; the use of violence to bring about peace, reasonable; and building society, all of life, around the ultimate reason for being: profit generation, wealth accumulation - all entirely reasonable.

The centrality of rank, hierarchy, exclusion, even death – this is not the stuff of the Way, there's nothing 'Easter' about any of it...

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9wg5pg1xp5o>

By way of contrast, today's Psalm pulls our attention back to the journey of faith, the Psalmist emphasizing that the whole world exists for the glory of God, to praise God, and sings "Hallelujah, praise the Lord from the heavens, praise God in the heights." The writer of Revelation lays out their vision, that the dwelling place of God is amongst us, that God will wipe away every tear, mourning and crying and pain will be no more, *death* will be no more ... for the first things have passed away.

This is Easter.

The world around us will do all that it can to suck us back in to a life centered on death and the things that bring death, to see only that ... but as followers of Jesus on the Way, we're to refuse to be swallowed up, or be crushed by human-created despair and suffering, trapped by it, or defeated. We have been set free, our minds opened, to truly see the world, as broken as it surely is, yet to still see it as a place infused with *life*, and the potential for life, and healing, and restoration, with the glory of God in every relationship, every encounter, fully present in it all; and to see possibility, massive possibility for the world we get to co-create, the world that is right now being born into existence through our thinking and doing, our choices, all the ways we respond to the world as it is, the way we love, our courage for change.

God is with us, we are inheritors of eternal life in Christ; Easter is our season to practice this knowing, to go, to explore, to use 'the map' to get us somewhere new, and amazing, and life-filled, so we can share what we each experience there, and help others understand what truly is possible and awaiting us all on this incredible journey of faith.