

Come and follow
The Rev. Dr. Martha Tucker
May 5, 2019

Blessed be God who animates our lives and offers us the gift of the sacrament of baptism that we all might know and come alive in the power of the Risen Christ by living water. Amen

I had many amazing experiences while engaged in CPE (clinical pastoral education) in Maine before being ordained. One of my most transformational occurred with what seemed at first an ordinary situation. I called on a man in his mid fifties about to have bypass surgery. When I entered his room having introduced myself I saw he had a crude drawing in his hand which he explained was a heart drawn by his surgeon. He carefully explained what he now understood was going to happen to him but he appeared still agitated. I gently probed this agitation and it was as though a finger was taken out of a dike and words and feelings gushed through.

He explained about his sons, one of whom was born again and while he was raised Catholic he really wasn't all that sure about God and did not go to church regularly. I assured him that God was still present for him and loved him beyond measure. He nodded and seemed relieved. Then I ventured out on that limb and asked if I might pray with him. I held his hands and said a prayer asking to protect him and to guide the surgeon and the people attending to him to care for him. I paused and just before saying AMEN he started interjecting his own petitions which were broader and more penetrating, seeking forgiveness and comfort for his family.

He then got very still and said I do not want to die.
There it was...he had reached the edge of all he knew and needed to know how he would fly...if he would fly...would there be an angel?

The short ending is he came through the surgery well. when I visited him the next day he appeared to be a new convert! Proclaiming the goodness of the Lord and gratitude for my accompaniment. We were interrupted by his son, the born again one, so I left.

I had just about gotten to the end of the hall and about to press the elevator when I heard CHAPLAIN CHAPLAIN...

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It was his son running toward me saying what did you do, my dad is different, what happened? He wants to go to church with me!
As I quickly scanned my ethics/confidentiality barometer I smiled and said something like: he is a remarkable man and I think it would be best to ask him! It will make for wonderful conversation.

I got on the elevator feeling light as a feather; giving thanks to God; knowing it wasn't me but so grateful I had been a witness to something called conversion. Ananias flashed through my heart.

The Greek word for conversion is metanoia and it means a turning around...

Today's stories are about conversion; that it happens and how it happens. And while Saul's conversion to Paul; from despicable oppressor to articulate faithful church builder is the height of unfathomable and even unbelievable drama, many of us have a hard time thinking this really happened. Many of us feel diminished that we have not had a conversion "experience" or mountain top moment.

Perhaps, we might approach conversions with different questions, especially if we are to find ourselves in them. Our search is for a truth which surpasses words and not for a proveable fact. I am reminded of the book of sermons which was given to me by my field ed supervisor entitled: just because it didn't happen does not mean it is not true

I think of that title almost every time I prepare a sermon and especially so at Easter: what about resurrection, what about Jesus' varied and multiple appearances, what about conversion? That there is a truth to all of them is not only central to our faith but comes with witnesses!

We focus so much on Saul that we forget Ananias' crucial role; we focus so much on the incredulity of the empty tomb that we forget Mary's witness, and all the others.

We focus so much on what we think a conversion is meant to feel and look like that we forget the buds outside which we witness in wonder every year; we focus so much on our status in the conversion competition, is mine bigger and more dramatic than yours, we forget about the neighbor we

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spontaneously assisted yesterday; we focus so much on what we haven't experienced that we forget about what we have! I focus so much on the next conversion I forget the power I have already witnessed and what it implies! I forget the man in Maine.

We all have witnessed the miracle of God's creation at some time. We all have processed that witness differently. We all are changed by it, in ways known and unknown.

Today the message is that God is always offering us the opportunity to turn around, to witness everyday signs of God's unfathomable grace and goodness. God is always inviting us to new life. God is always Eastering us into beings who are more fully formed in God's image. This is the sacred timeless process of sanctification.

We only have to come and follow. a beautiful couplet of verbs; a beautiful empowering hymn.

Notice the story of Peter. Beautiful in its symmetry that he claims his love for Jesus three times after denying him as many times. The story of Jesus' appearance ends in a simple statement: Follow me

After a conversion, big or small, momentous or seemingly subtle, we are changed. As convert, as witness, we are different somehow.

And after conversion, after Jesus appears in our lives, reveals a sense of the divine, the power of the resurrection, we are also called upon to respond. We too are called to come and follow...

Baptism is also a story of conversion, a transforming reforming moment which may be life shattering in a shaft of light way as in an altar call and cries of I am Saved
or as in today's blessedly assured way of welcoming and sprinkling and anointing a child with the living water of God's love

Not only do we believe that Elin is changed now welcomed into the Body of Christ and belonging anew but so are we changed, every time we witness,

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every time we reaffirm our baptismal covenant, every time we are sprinkled...

We take our place this Eastertide with Mary and the women at the tomb, with the beloved disciple, with Paul and Peter, with Thomas and the travelers on the road to Emmaus. We listen for a call like that of Ananias that we might respond in the affirmative and do our part. We are looking for him because we have heard about him. And then we turn and...

Come and follow
Taste and See
Touch and believe
Seek and Ye shall find
Knock and the door will be opened

These couplets frame our faith this Eastertide; as we make sense of the risen Christ and what it means in our lives. These couplets of verbs actualize our faith.

Today, we go to the font and baptize.
we go to water
Then we set a banquet table and celebrate.

We imitate the stories of the Bible in hopes of realizing similar power and grace. John's story of the fishermen on the beach involved living water and an abundant feeding.

Let us now gather at the water before feasting on a meal hosted by the Risen Christ. As we do I remind you of the poem Coming to Water which says everything to me about our call to experience the power of God's creation. and the notion that we will always walk away transformed.

COMING TO WATER (Nicola Slee)
COME TO water. It may be lake, river or sea.
It does not matter, so long as the source is clean.
Each makes its own kind of poultice for sickness.

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Here you will find healing,
though it may not be in the form you are seeking.

You must build a necessary hunger before you get there.
You must be needy. You must be hurting.
You must be lonely as the seabird's cry
far out near the horizon.

After arriving, you must wait for a long while.
You will still be arriving.
Walk and walk and walk by the water's edge.
Sit for long stretches at a time
gazing out at its many surfaces.
Think of nothing.
Let time and the passages of daylight and darkness
pass over and under you.

If it is dry and the sun beats golden on you,
close your eyes and bask in the miracle of warmth.
If it rains, whether sweetly or fiercely,
let your face be turned upwards to receive its blessing,
Your skin be covered in wetness.
If a storm should holler and range and shake the skies,
walk out in it, let your body be blasted
by an energy that knocks you sideways,
emptying your limbs of all resistance.

You must go to the water.
You must take what it offers.
You must yield what it asks of you.
You must submit to its tenderness.
You must leave when it is time, though it is never time for leaving.
You must walk away still thirsty,
with the sound of its pouring ringing in your ears.[1]

Let us embody the witnesses and converts; let us go and follow Jesus
empowered by the Holy Spirit! Amen