

Sermons at Christ Church

Lord, Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace.

Easter Sunday
The Reverend Emmanuel Ato Mercer

Easter, the story that awakens our hunger and yet satisfies that very hunger. The one event which quenches the thirst of our thirsty souls. The improbable story that answers our questions, all of our desperate questions and settles our curiosity. Easter's question is, how hungry are you?

The events of the past couple of days have been heartbreaking for Mary. She had a lot of questions but there was no one to answer those questions. She had wondered why in the world did all of that had to happen to someone as peaceful and innocent as her Rabbi-Jesus. She herself may have seen others crucified on the Roman cross but no one as close as her Rabbi who couldn't hurt a fly. Mary was angry and hungry, not for food but for answers. A response to her curiosity led her to the garden where her Rabbi was laid in a new tomb.

Within the Easter story lies human brokenness and hunger, but within it lies also our healing, mending, satisfaction and an opportunity for new beginnings. Easter doesn't pretend that there has been *Kum Ba Yah* all along, it acknowledges suffering and despair but it also points to the possibility of hope and newness, that each has the capacity to turn the challenges of our lives around. Easter invites us to clean some of the anxiety, vanity and resentment so as to allow the possibility of a new world to find a room in us.

A couple of years ago, a parishioner, Sonni shared the story of a BBC documentary about James Plummer Jr. James was drenched in poverty, an unstable family condition and challenging childhood. His father was a drug dealer and so couldn't stay at one place, James moved around a lot, changing schools, homes and states multiple times.

But he was a smart kid. One day, when he was nine years old, he was reading an encyclopedia and got to the letter 'E'. There by chance, he discovered Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, and that set in motion a lifelong passion. A passion that would lead him out of poverty. Remember, James was a smart kid and he came to understand physics in an incredible way. James started to win at state science fairs and for college, he was admitted to the elite physics course at Stanford University.

James had a secret: he was hooked on crack cocaine. And he knew he had to change and conquer his addiction if he was to fulfil his academic ambitions. He knew he had to turn his life around.

James went to someone he admired and respected and shared his deepest secrets with this person-it must have felt like Mary walking in the darkness of discontent to the tomb of despair not knowing if she'll find light. In his transformation, James changed his name and took on a new identity-he carefully chose a new name: Hakeem Muata Oluseyi.

The first name Hakeem means wise-it expressed who he wished to become. Whenever anyone called him, he was reminded of who he wished to become. The second name Muata-means someone who seeks the truth or seeker of truth-he wanted to seek truth. The last name Oluseyi-a name from the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria, honored his heritage and meant God has done this.

Yes, God has done this. The God who resurrected Jesus from the dead has done it-he resurrected Hakeem from the mire. The God who turns lives around and provides us with new beginnings, has done it. The God who awakens us to look at ourselves in ways we have never thought possible has done it. The God who satisfies human hunger has done it. The God who breathes new life into us has done it. The God who heals, mends, reconciles and renews us with hope, has done it. How hungry are you?

You can tell that Hakeem was hungry for something. He had been battered by drug use and a challenging life. He, like Mary, acknowledged the suffocating nature of what the past has been. He was not only suspicious of the darkness of the tomb in which he found himself but wondered if he still wanted that life. He hungered for something new, something different, something purposeful. Easter's question is, how hungry are you? Do you hunger for purpose? Do you hunger for life?

On Easter morning, Mary was hungry for something. The gospel doesn't tell us why Mary decided to go out to the tomb early that morning. But I am sure her hunger was not only about being close to the man she called Rabbouni, nor was it about touching the tomb to feel connected to him. She hungered for something different by being at the tomb without knowing what she wanted.

A few weeks ago I was at a conference in Jacksonville, and I heard Jon Meacham tell a story about the late former President George Bush. According to Jon, when the former president was in boarding school, the boys typically went on a run after the lunch. But there was one boy who didn't like to run. One day, his classmates convinced him to run, and he did.

The interesting thing was that the former president could've outrun this kid but rather stayed close. As they run, this kid fell down and couldn't get up. The former president who was not far off, run back and helped this boy up to continue his run.

President Bush didn't tell the story, it was the daughter of the schoolmate he helped who told the story to Jon Meacham. And when Jon Meacham asked the president about the story, the President said *"I remember that kid he ate a lot at lunch."* But Jon asked *"Mr. President, why did you go back to help him."* His response was profound *"I helped him because I want to believe that when I fall down, somebody would help me."*

We all do fall. We fall-as in taking a fall or sinning or falling on hard times. But we want to believe that because of the Easter story, when we fall, our mates, friends, neighbors, colleagues, people of faith, strangers-anybody would want to give us a hand up-so we can begin anew. We want to believe that the Christian is not the person who has accepted a particular set of theories about the universe but the person who lives by the power of the joy laid bare in the event of the resurrection of Jesus. If the Easter story is true, it is true because of the way it works in the Christian. If the Easter story is true it is true because the Christian can learn and assimilate its values by risking to live it. That Christian who lives it isn't shy to let others know that they would learn nothing by looking, but would learn a great deal if they live it.

The point is that you and I are hungry, but our hunger often makes us feel so helpless like Peter and John who after running to the tomb went back to their homes in fear. Our hunger takes us to different places that doesn't represent the people we are or want to be. Our hunger makes us do things that doesn't represent who we have become-a resurrected people. Our hunger compromises our relationship with our loved ones. Our hunger makes us lose sight of the surprise of love-the love which drove Mary to the garden, the love that resurrected Jesus from the dead and promises us that nothing can separate us from it. The love that always welcomes us, feeds us and satisfies that very hunger we feel within us. The Love which invites us to sit and eat because it assures us God accepts us in spite of our brokenness.

There's no doubt that we are hungry. But are you willing and ready to sit and eat? George Herbert in his poem Love III writes this:

*Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
 If I lacked anything*

*A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
 Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
 I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
 Who made the eyes but I?*

*Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
 My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
 So I did sit and eat.*

The poem reflects love's refusal to let go of a hungry, broken and helpless sinner who couldn't fathom why he or she deserves love's gracious welcome and acceptance. How hungry are you?

Easter, the story that awakens the hunger in us and yet points to a fulfillment that is available in Jesus Christ. How hungry are you? I am hungry enough to sit and eat of the bread that satisfies my hunger and provides me with new life, new hope and new beginnings. The only requirement is to sit and eat. Welcome to Love's Easter banquet. Sit and eat. Happy Easter. Amen.