

A-Easter 3, 2008  
St. Luke's, Renton, WA  
Kevin Pearson, Preacher

Luke 24.13-35

“... *that we may behold him in all his redeeming work ...*”

We continue to tell the gospel stories about the religious experience of Jesus' followers after his crucifixion. These post-resurrection accounts renowned Episcopalian preacher Barbara Brown Taylor says are “more metaphysical than physical.”

Last week it was John's story of a Jesus who walked through walls and locked doors into the heart of humanity, helping us beyond a doubt to trust in God's continuing presence.

This week it's the tale of two downcast disciples commiserating with one another on their way home from Jerusalem. Can't you just imagine how crushingly devastated they are by the death of Jesus. He was to be their salvation. Jesus was their one shot in the dark; he was life amidst their poverty; he was hope in their grief; he was soul food for their soul-starved selves. And now it's all over. When, all of the sudden, these two followers look up from their circumstances, they look up from their downcast hearts, beating sadness back and forth, they look up and behold a stranger who, as turns out, becomes Christ to them. He opens their eyes and they see that it isn't over after all. A sweep of open expanse unveils before them like clouds lifting over the Cascades. They rush back to Jerusalem, back to their friends, to proclaim “it's not over. It's not over.”

I love that old Easter story, I've told here before, of a group tour of paintings in a large New York art gallery. They came upon a painting entitled *Check Mate*. The tour guide explained the painting in which a representation of Satan and his opponent are sitting at a chessboard. Satan has just made his last move to defeat his opponent and dominates the painting with a confident leer on his face. The group pondered the painting for a moment and moved on to the next one. From painting to painting they moved, not noticing that one of their number lingered behind, staring at *Check Mate*. The group had finished that wing of the gallery and had moved on when all of the sudden they heard the clatter of running feet resounding through the cavernous corridor and a voice far off but growing closer began to scream, “It's a lie!” “It's a lie!” “The King has another move!”

Out of breath the man who lingered at the painting identified himself as a famous chess champion. And as he pondered the chessboard he discovered, to his amazement, that the game was indeed not over; that Satan had not won; that the painting's title, *Check Mate*, was a lie; that the opponent's King had another move.

However dismal we may paint the picture of our lives at any given time, the truth we've signed on for in this Easter faith is that the King always has another move. We live with that caveat, with that possibility, with that *reality* ever before us.

The stories of Jesus' continued appearance to his followers after his death help us, as our opening prayer said, “to open the eyes of our faith that we may behold him in all his redeeming work.” It isn't over. The King has another move.



How easy it is to settle back into the old routine after Easter hymns are trumpeted. After being aroused from our slumber, it's easy to find, again, the dark side of our life experience and go back to sleep there. But these stories remind us that it isn't over and they remind us to keep seeing our way through the dark—we who have signed on to resurrection. They help us to behold the face of God in all the ways that God is warming hearts which had grown distant and cold.

I in her new book *Leaving Church*, Brown Taylor tells her story of leaving parish ministry to take up a college teaching post. She says that for the past decade she has found herself ever in a wrangle with peoples' and the institutions' competing certitudes of correct belief, when what first captured her soul and religious imagination, and the reason she got into the God-business in the first place had to do with beholding. Beholding the Divine. That's what warmed her heart. About leaving church, Taylor writes, "I wanted out of the believing business and back into the *beholding* business."

Well today's invitation to the church—to you and to me—is to take back to the business of beholding, to give ourselves over to the beauty of God's work turning despair to delight. To look up from our circumstance at any given time and behold; see with new eyes. To live with resurrection is to live our lives with the possibility, in every circumstance, that it isn't over, the King has another move.

Speaking of King, maybe you, like me, have been listening to bits and pieces, if not whole speeches, of Martin Luther King Jr. this past week. The other night I watched transfixed as he delivered that fateful and final proclamation of his life, words emblazoned on our mind's eye, when he wound himself into a crescendo thundering "I have been to the mountaintop, I have seen the promised land ... mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." It's about beholding. Imagine what it was that man beheld. Imagine what vision King beheld in order to *see through* the crushing despair, daily loss, demeaning epithets to the redeeming work of God. Sometimes the clearest light shines in the darkness and King surely beheld a brilliant light who was his friend and not a stranger. His struggle and his life have helped us to see the blazing glory of God at work.

I always wonder, what would have happened in this land had King not been cut down, had he been allowed to continue, would we have reached the Promised Land? But what we were given in Dr. King was another story. Another post-resurrection story as metaphysical as it was physical. And his story has allowed us, if we open the eyes of our faith; this story has allowed us to behold God in all his redeeming work. And it's not over, it isn't over. The King has another move.

You with Easter in your eyes, you with fire in your heart, you who are tired of looking down and commiserating as you walk home in disappointment, it's not over, the King has another move. And that move will involve you, should you be willing to open your eyes and behold him redeeming us all.