

Easter 2016

The Rev. Fred Devall

Anyone wanting to build a stone archway must first understand what makes an arch possible- the keystone. Without the keystone, there is no arch. This morning I'd like to tell you about two archways of sorts. The first "archway" is embedded within the Gospel Reading today.

The curious reaction of the women at the tomb reveals their numbness and perhaps even a state of shock at having witnessed Jesus' crucifixion two days before. This was not how the movement was supposed to go, but now Jesus is dead and they are trying to wrap their minds around this fact. Then appear two men in dazzling white, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:4). This is a rather odd question to ask in a cemetery. The women were no doubt looking for the dead among the dead, and here are two asking their bizarre question, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

Then comes the keystone- "Remember". "Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again" (Luke 24:6). While it is told in sequence it does not give us any indication of how long all of this took? It is likely a compressed narrative that this unfolded over the course of at least an hour or two and that it took more than a few minutes for them to recover from their shock to begin having coherent conversation. In your moment of pastoral shock be patient and kind with yourself and keep in mind that if it took the disciples of Jesus more than a second to remember, so it may take some time for you too.

The second archway that I'd like to present is the liturgical dance that the church has been playing out since Thursday. Although many of us have come to church three separate times for services marking Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and now Easter, (like Jesus' garment for which the soldiers cast lots) they are viewed as one seamless event called the Triduum. If the Passion of Jesus is the archway, then the Resurrection is the keystone; this arch is a passage way of sorts to the new reality that God has set before us.

One of the hallmarks of the Maundy Thursday service is the foot-washing. At the end of the introductory narrative a very important line is read, "But come

remembering his admonition that what will be done for you is also to be done by you to others" (*Book of Occasional Services*, p. 93).

The late great Henri Nouwen was a Roman Catholic priest, respected scholar, noted artist and in many ways a tragic figure. Nouwen suffered from depression and struggled to reconcile himself within the Good News of Christ that he was able to preach so eloquently to others, but he could not always absorb his own words. Nouwen had conquered the academic world, teaching at Notre Dame, Yale, and Harvard. He left that to become the chaplain at L'Arche Daybreak Community in Richmond Hill, Ontario. L'Arche is a series of communities established by Jean Vanier for people with severe disabilities. Nouwen, now ensconced in a Eucharistic community, was able to come to terms with himself and find peace before his untimely death. That a world class scholar would give up the academy to pastor the disabled was a shock and mystery to many people, but it represented an embodiment of Jesus words that we too must serve as Jesus has served us.

On Good Friday we walked around this very space praying the Stations of the Cross, followed by the traditional noonday Prayer Book service focusing on the meaning of the cross. Five years after the tragic death of her father, a daughter was still trying to catch her balance in life. The utter cruelty of her step-mother in the days of preparation and burial for her father were astonishing and deeply hurtful. Life became difficult to navigate. Little by little she began to claw her way out of the darkness. Now with her own family she decided it was time to create new traditions by reclaiming old practices of walking The Way of the Cross and praying the noonday service. In something well beyond coincidence the meaning of the cross penetrated her heart. She later wrote in response to her epiphany, "I came to church today to create a new Good Friday memory and to reclaim the day for what it is meant to be. Listening, I finally understood and knew deep in my heart that it was time to forgive my step-mother. I have worked for five years to understand and know this." Sometimes in the fog of grief it takes us a while to remember.

Today we are here to remember. Memory for the church is something deeper than recollection. It is a miracle that collapses time of past, present, and future into one reality. When we stand at the altar and pray over the bread and wine, we do it in memory of Jesus, and not in strict memorial sense but in

acknowledgment that the past is made present in a transformational and mysterious way.

A woman was on her deathbed. Her son and daughter-in-law kept vigil. Needing to go to their own home to shower up and rest before returning, they made the short drive home. They were gone no more than five or ten minutes when the sitter called to say that the end was at hand and they should return immediately. When they arrived it was too late but the sitter told them that the previously comatose woman opened her eyes. The sitter continued, "After opening her eyes she said a name- Louis. Who is Louis?" Unbeknownst to the sitter, Louis was the late husband of newly deceased.

We forget that there are two paths to living in this world. One is the "way of the world" which upholds power, force, and other projections of strength as a means to success and the other is the way of Jesus. His way was initially viewed as a failure; yet his way of love has prevailed in the face of powers and principalities. We celebrate his triumph with a renewed call to walk in his way. With the resurrection, everything we thought we knew, was ripped away, giving birth to new possibilities, if only we would remember and walk through the archway to new life. *Amen.*