

3rd Sunday in Easter, April 10, 2016

Acts 9:1-20

John 21:1-19

The Rev Fanny Belanger

In the seventies, we had in France this philosopher,
Michel Foucault.

Maybe you know him, he was quite famous.

Not as famous as Jean-Paul Sartre – but still.

Michel Foucault was mostly interested in the way governments control people.

He wrote many books about jail systems, mental health institutions, sexual repression.

As you would guess, it was fascinating yet not a lot of fun to read.

And so, it was so surprising one day when a journalist

- getting off the beaten tracks of politics -

asked Michel Foucault out of the blue: *How happiness looked like for him.*

What was even more surprising than the question, was the response Foucault gave to the journalist.

He did not talk about reforms, Revolution or even

Redemption.

But he just said this simple thing:

“Happiness is like having breakfast with someone you love on the terrace of an hotel by the sea”.

Happiness is like having breakfast with someone you love on the terrace of an hotel by the sea.

Well, I can't help thinking about this quote

each time I hear the Gospel we have read today,

wondering how happiness looked like into Simon Peter's heart

while he was having breakfast with Jesus, on the shore of the sea of Galilee.

Jesus, the risen Christ, coming back from the dead,

to cook fish for his friends.

I don't know if we still grasp the weirdness of it all.

And I guess it's a shame because if we miss the weirdness

we also miss the beauty, the wonder and the magic of what the Resurrection means.

Resurrection is like having breakfast with your Lord, casually sitting by the sea, next to a bonfire.

I guess that what Michel Foucault meant by his quote

is that we made of happiness something very complicated.

Philosophy: Do we have reasonable reasons to be happy?

Socioeconomic: How can we work towards more global or individual happiness?

Psychology: How come am I not happy when I have everything I could long for?

Well, the thing is

Not matter how hard you try to figure it out

Happiness is just there, with the one you love, by the sea.

And as it turns out, Resurrection is just the same.

We made of Resurrection something difficult to grasp, almost scary, far from us,

(maybe this is how you felt this morning when you heard the reading from the book of Revelation)

Triumphant with cymbals and trumpets

Jesus in the sky with all the glory

when as Bishop Susan put it last week

Easter is just the happiest day in the world

Easter is just the happiest day in the world is all

“is all” but also:

is everything.

Resurrection is so simple

so casual, almost comical, if you think about it.

Mary Magdalene thinking Jesus is a gardener, Jesus walking to Emmaus pretending he does not know what's happening in Jerusalem,

and of course, as of today: Jesus cooking fish.

I think we need to get used to this paradox that
in the Gospel, Resurrection is light, Resurrection is funny
and still it's the deepest mystery ever, it's the core of our faith
And it's our reason to believe.
But still it's light and it's easy, just because it's the happiest thing that ever happened
in the world and to us.
And happiness is not about being puzzled or terrified,
as surely as it isn't about finding the key to human behavior or to state regulations.
Happiness is not even about finding the perfect balance between work and leisure and family.
Happiness is about being alive and enjoying it
And this is exactly what Resurrection is all about.

How does happiness look like for you?
When is it that you feel alive, and blessed and perhaps redeemed?
We all have these moments of grace Maren Morris describes in a touching way in her well named song
My church.
You know, when she says she can experience Redemption driving on the highway,
listening to her favorite music, that brings this perfect blend of hope and nostalgia.
Maybe this how grace looks like for you too, or maybe
It is to wake up to find out everything is coated in white
it's not because you enjoy snow so much anymore, but because
you remember it used to make you feel happy when you were a child.
Or maybe it is to find out your cherry tree has bloomed while you were sleeping.
Or maybe happiness is having the cat snuggling with you and
although you keep thinking you have so much to do you don't move and you
barely breathe
because you're so afraid to break the spell of his perfect bliss.
I think Maren Morris' song is so very true.
Resurrection indeed has something to do with being able to feel the grace of these precious moments
knowing that you are alive.
Not only in your body, but within you, in the depths of your soul.
As a Simon Peter throwing himself into the sea,
it's having your heart leaping for joy
because you experience that life is something bigger than you.
And you start to love life
and what happens is that one day, maybe,
you understand that what is truly going on is not that you love life, but it is that
Life loves you
Life loves you.
You discover you're not just thrown into the world
You are beloved.
Because Life is not a blind biological process: Life is love, and life is God.
In John's Gospel, Jesus says it all the time: *I am the Life.*
He is the Life, indeed.
Not the Jesus of flesh and blood who died on the cross
But the Christ,
the eternal word of God,
God made known to us, telling his story in the very human life of Jesus
And telling us *how happiness looks like for God*
Breakfast, friendship - and sometimes a little more than this: fastening your belt and going.

Because what we learn from John's Gospel is that
God
is a God who wants to bring us from the love of our own life to the love of Life.
From the love of our own life to a life of love.
And this is of course where we are challenged.
I guess for all of us,
as an emotion, love can look pretty easy, and light.
Who among us would not say to the Lord
You know all, you know that I love you?
We all can relate to that
and yet, as Simon Peter, we all have to experience the narrowness
of our own hearts.
I guess it was the same
(even worst)
for Saul *who loved his friends, hated his enemies.*
Well, I love it that Christ made of these two guys, Simon and Saul
the pillars of the church.
Because they are so much like us:
We think we are right when we could not be so wrong
We make promises we never hold
We lose our friends, we deceive the ones we love
We lose sight of our God.
And yet.
Yet, luckily for us, Resurrection is not only about happy moments or tender feelings.
Because that's also in difficult moments that we can experience that Life is bigger than us.
Because God can turn us upside down
as he turned Simon into Peter
as he turned Saul into Paul
He can turn us into somebody we never imagined and who is yet
so deeply us.
You turned my wailing into dancing, sings our Psalm today.
God's love is not only an emotion,
it's creation, it's resurrection.
It's not the *phileo* Peter uses in the original Greek – *of course I like you.*
God's love is *agape*, the word Christ uses
Simon, do you love me more than these?
Simon, do you love me more than anything in the whole world?
Love is not only an emotion,
It is beyond anything in the whole world.
The Love of Christ is the foundation, the key to the kingdom,
It is the stepladder of angels, the backbone of the creation, the essence of reality.
The real and only death is to lose
our ability to love and to feel loved,
thinking we are alone in the world
and that there is no much more to live than what we can touch or see.
We are just so limited by our own understanding of what life is, by our senses, but mostly
we are so limited by what we dread, what we desire, what we think should be.
And so we fail,
of course.
We fail to live up to God's standards but again: how couldn't we?

The good news is
Not only God is okay with our failing but maybe, I came to think:
Maybe God genuinely wants us to fail.
Not because God is a sadist,
but because:
Failure is another way to experience how life is much more than what we think it can be.

I read recently a terrific article in the Washington Post called
The message our children need to hear but almost never do.
The journalist says that we have become so protective with our children
We make them believe that the world is full of dangers
or at least
we bring them to think we live in a tough world, competitive and greedy
a world where they have to find a way to survive
(if you still doubt that's how we make our children feel,
go read the *Hunger Games* and it will tell you all about it).
Well, the journalist says:
Our children need to learn that failure is okay
and more than that
it's not only that "Failure happens"
Failure is part of life itself.
You know, the motto of the space program "Failure is not an option"
Well, ironically *Failure is not an option* indeed
Because failure will happen, whatever we do.
Failure is part of our reality, part of who we are.
Simon failed, Saul failed
We all fail.
Because we are limited, because we are blind, because we don't know what life is.
But it's okay, says the journalist.
It's okay, our children don't need to be overprotected, they don't need to toughen up either.
Yes, the world can be hard, but life is good and mostly:
We are resilient.
And that is what our Gospel is all about today:
We fail, we learn and we grow and our failure open holy wounds that deepen our hearts and our lives
to the bigger life of Christ.
And more than that: We will never know Christ if we live the perfect life with no failure at all.
Because Christ enters into the cracks of our limited lives
He reveals a life bigger than us
Eternal life, Resurrection.
We are resilient. Not only emotionally, but spiritually.
And think about it: Resurrection is the perfect resilience.
And that's what happiness is all about
Whatever happens: finding grace
going on
and dragging the world into the life of Christ.
Love is not only an emotion, love is motion
shinning forth the message of happiness and resilience and hope of the Gospel.
as Peter did, as Paul did.
As we are invited to do, also.
Fasten our belt, and go. Amen.