

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE ON THE RESURRECTION SIDE OF EASTER

By Father Eric A. Anderson

Scientifically speaking, the answer is: $E=MC^2$. Albert Einstein published his *Special Theory of Relativity*, in 1905 and so in so doing so discovered that mass and energy are actually the same thing. The mass-energy equivalence has had a major impact on all our lives. We know the answer, but do we know the question or the reason for the question? Do we understand the methodology or quest for the question or the experiences it took to even form the question that lead to this answer? Without understanding the question the answer is irrelevant!

Spiritually speaking the answer can be found in the words of our baptism, *The Book of Common Prayer* page 306. "Almighty God, your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed with the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin to everlasting life. In the water of Baptism we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. (Romans 6:3-4). In other words, the answer is: Salvation.

How do we discover the question to the answer? In formulating a question, I want to share with you a personal experience to illustrate what will follow below. I was a young Vicar in a downtown church in Long Beach, California in the early 1990's. I began this position a couple of months prior to the Rodney King/LA riots. The tension in the air was palatable, Long Beach and Los Angeles County felt like a tinder box waiting to be ignited. The church was situated in a multi-cultural neighborhood of Mexicans, Blacks, Koreans, and Whites. This multicultural neighborhood was not a melting pot as much as a boiling pot, marked by graffiti that separated one from the other. The first couple of weeks I saw shoes tied together thrown over power lines around the neighborhood and then I saw more and more of them. I asked what does this mean. I was told every time a gang member is killed they throw their shoes on the lines.

The church was like a fortress, bars on the windows, iron fences around the property and gates on the doors. This church spoke in silence loudly to the neighborhood that you are not welcomed here. This was the churches out dated form of ministry, but not mine. Over a period of days I saw five boys ages nine and ten playing on the street outside the church. I invited them in by opening the gates. They were all friends and what society labeled as misfits. They were the perfect group of disciples. One was Cambodian who was born while his mother was escaping Cambodia on a boat. Two brothers were black. Their father had been murdered and their mother sold drugs. One was Mexican and another was Latino both born here by mothers who were not here illegally. The last one was white and very poor but always smiled. I wanted these boys to have a safe place to play. They told me they like playing street hockey and they played it with sticks and a can they found. I shared this with a few people at a neighborhood bar, who did not go to church because they did not believe in what the church stood for, but they donated money to buy gear for street hockey and donated a ping pong table. Soon these boys were not just playing outside the church but inside too. They had found a safe place to belong. My methodology is proclaiming the Gospel and use words when needed.

I grew up near Long Beach, so going here to be the Vicar was in a way going home. Every time I find myself in a new city, state or country which has been numerous, I begin by seeking the question by talking to locals, reading, observing, and intuition. I authentically want to understand who is Jesus or God to the people in my neighborhood and how best do I serve the Christ in them?" The first part of this question is important to discern because there is not one right answer to this question. Depending on one's upbringing, culture, race, social-economics, education, orientation, experience, and religious or spiritual focus, etcetera, this answer changes dramatically. There is not a wrong answer, just different answers depending on where one is on their spiritual journey.

California is ahead of most national trends and Southern California has given rise to new-age churches, cults, fast growing fundamental and evangelical churches, non-religious and a new spiritual movement, and also groups who just gave up on God. At the same time the mainstream churches had already begun to wane before the 1990's. People were giving up or tuning out on traditional image or message of Jesus, and seeking a newer image or message to find their answer, but as I observed often without understanding the question. There is a saying "everything that is old is new again," or "the more things change the more things stay the same". For example, the Protestant Reformation which was a major 16th century European movement aimed initially at reforming the beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholic Churches. However, its religious aspects were supplemented by ambitious political rulers who wanted to expand their power and control at the expense of the Church. Then there is the East-West schism, also called the schism of 1054. This was the break of communion between what is now the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic

Churches resulting from theological disputes on the source of the Holy Spirit among other issues. In 1378 - 1417 there was the Western Schism or Papal schism where there was a split in the Catholic Church when three men simultaneously claimed to be the true Pope. This was driven more by politics than any theological disagreement. In the first century of the Common Era there were many sects of Jewish society. The Essenes, who thought they alone, possessed the truth. The Sadducees functioned as a social-political party. The Zealots, who took their religious interpretation and turned it into a political agenda of rebellion, then there were the Pharisees, a scholarly group and meticulous observers of the ancestral law. All these people and issues have not disappeared but reinvented themselves in contemporary issues. If we do not understand what happened in the past or why they happened, we are bound to go on repeating the same mistakes until we Christians collectively learn. To discover who is Jesus or God for the people in our neighborhood, we need to meet them one on one as persons where they are on their spiritual journey and walk with them.

The second part of my question is how do I/we serve the Christ in them? Always remembering the answer is Salvation, I turned to the Baptismal Covenant on page 305 in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

- **Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?**

The tenet of the Episcopal Faith is Scriptures holds everything we need to know for Salvation. We are to always proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ; we need to know who Christ is not just for ourselves but to others, and to understand the meaning God in Christ? The Creeds explain our faith and understanding in the two natures of Jesus the Christ. He is fully human and fully God. We should know Jesus through Scriptures and also from our Christ's experiences of self and others. Knowing which of the Hebrew Scriptures Jesus most often quoted when He proclaimed the Good News is extremely important in knowing Christ. We know that after Jesus was baptized and led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted (His temptations were very real as our own are for us). Jesus used a weapon that all have at our disposal to defeat Satan, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God [Ephesian 6:17]. Jesus quoted from the Book of Deuteronomy.

When Jesus began his public ministry he was in his hometown of Nazareth at the synagogue; it was the Sabbath and He was asked to read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah (61: 1-2). He read, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" [Luke 4:18]. This passage tells of the Messiah's ministry of preaching and healing, to meet every human need. To grasp the full meaning of the Messiah's ministry one need to understand how Jesus proclaimed this both spiritually as well as the physically, so we can do the same.

The core of what Jesus proclaimed by word and example is LOVE! God's love had been misinterpreted in Jesus's time by the religious and political leaders of the Jewish people to secure their place of power, position and prestige in the Temple. Unfortunately today different organizations are guilty of this same sin. God who is very much involved in His chosen people's lives sent prophets to proclaimed the truth and then God sent His Son, Jesus. The prophets were killed for proclaiming the true word of God. To know God's love and the message Jesus proclaimed one needs to internally digest what Martin Luther called the Gospel within the Gospel, John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The words of this Holy Scripture reveal the great truth that motivated God's plan of salvation. When Jesus's was talking to the Samaritan woman at the well, he revealed to her, He was the Messiah and the water He gives will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

The Gospel of Matthew, Jesus's is asked by an expert of the law, which is the greatest commandment of the Law? This question is comprehensive including the entire Hebrew Scriptures; the Law and the Prophets. Jesus's answer is comprehensive of God's plan of salvation. "Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And thy second is like unto it: Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Laws and the Prophets. God's love is complete, it's not singular, it's not linear, but it's circular. In other words you can't know Love without loving yourself, and others and Christ. Love is a Holy Trinity.

- **Will you seek to serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?**

To be able to answer this question begins with knowing who Christ is in your soul and heart. In the Book of Common Prayer there is an outline of faith commonly called the catechism. On Page 849 - 850 there is a Q & A on God the Son. This is a good place to begin an academic knowledge of who is Christ but to know Christ in your heart and soul these questions and answers need to be lived and experienced in your lives with others daily. To walk and talk with Jesus daily is by reading and inwardly digesting the Holy Scriptures. The Gospel of John 1:1-18 explains the two natures of Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ the second persona of the Holy Trinity. (John 1:1-2) John writes, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning". By using the Word, John makes a distinction from God the Father and Jesus, the Word, was God in the fullest sense. There is only One God with three distinct personas'. (John 1:14) "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John who was a disciple and witness of Jesus is telling us that the Word existed before he became human. Christ revealed his glory to his disciples (and to us) by his death and resurrection. The words grace and truth can be translated as unending love.

To know who Jesus is and who he is as the Messiah (The Christ) one needs to know how and why Jesus identified himself as the Suffering Servant as the Prophet Isaiah wrote in 52:13-53:12. We have to understand his identity. There is an old saying that God made us in God's own image and the we returned the favor, meaning that throughout history people have made God in their image to fit their narrow narratives, by the way, this is the definition of sin.

Every time we Episcopalians and the members of the Anglican Communion gather for Mass we celebrate Christ resurrected in the Eucharist. Each one of our Eucharist Prayers says, "on the night he (Jesus was betrayed) was handed over to (from the religious leaders to the political leader) suffering and death. This part of the Prayer is to remind us that Jesus suffered like us and for us, and that he truly died the death of a criminal. It was in his suffering that his full humanity was realized. Being fully obedient to the Father's will, Christ sits at the right-hand of God. He will come again in glory (unending love) to judge the living and the dead (spiritually and physically dead). This part of the Prayer forces us to see and acknowledge Jesus's suffering and the part we play. It calls us to recognize our own brokenness and suffering caused by sin. It makes us acknowledge other peoples suffering. Like the Great Commandment of Love, suffering is not singular, it's not linear, it is circular - a Holy Trinity. To understand the humanity found in suffering we must be able to see and hear with our spiritual ears and eyes what Jesus spoke from the cross as he was dying. (Luke 23:34) "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing". These words are similar to Psalm 22. The people Jesus is asking to be forgiven saw in the passion of Jesus the fulfillment of this cry of the righteous sufferer. (Luke 23:43) "Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth (unending love), today you will be in paradise with me'". The criminals crucified with him mocked and insulted him (another form of suffering). Later one of the criminals later repented (asked for forgiveness) and asked to be included in Jesus' kingdom.

We baptized Christians who are baptized into Christ's death to seek Christ in all persons. The Christ we seek to serve in others is the suffering servant. We believe that there is only One God, The Holy Trinity. The One God is the Creator of All. In other words, since God created all and Jesus is God, then we need to see the Christ in all persons regardless of their religion, or lack of religion. In the Gospel of Matthew 25:35-40, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me..." These verses are about the Day of Judgment, or said another way, the Day of Redemption. The basis of judgment or redemption will be whether love is shown to God's people. Love is a verb, an action and this action is revealed in compassion, both spiritually and physically, to God, self, and others, again the Holy Trinity. These words are not only spoken by Jesus for Jesus they are spoken by Jesus for us, and they are spoken by Jesus for all our neighbors: for we all hunger, thirst, are excluded as a stranger, are rejected for an illness, know poverty and cannot afford the basic needs to live like clothing and shelter, and those who have been judged and convicted of a sin that may or may not have been done, we need to act in Love. Sadly many people will turn a blind eye, ear and hand to the sufferings of others because they will not see in others what they refuse to see in themselves. They will walk by someone suffering not aware of the suffering Christ in that person. People whose lives are still lived as if the Resurrection has not happened will walk by judging and scorning the Christ in all persons.

The answer is Salvation and the question is how do we become the person who lives on the Resurrection side of Easter? Let us say with our actions and words if necessary. Christ is risen! Go out into the world together to seek and serve the suffering and the needs of our neighbors. Let us love them and love ourselves as Christ our Lord loves us.