

“Holy Encounter”

John 11:1-45

We are entering the fifth week of Lent this week. I hope your Lent has been good so far and I pray that you will have a meaningful rest of the Lent.

For the last few weeks in the Gospel readings, we have seen people encountering Jesus, or Jesus encountering them: Nicodemus, a woman at the well and a blind man - then their lives were changed forever. Nicodemus, a Pharisee, who came to see Jesus in the security of the night, was changed to be the person, who took care of Jesus' body after his death on the cross and anointed it with precious oil. The life of the Samaritan woman at the well was changed forever. She was no longer avoiding the crowd, who most likely had judged her for her past. She became an evangelist to the villagers and said to them, “Come and see a man who has told me everything I've done! Could this man be the Christ?” She became a catalyst that changed other people's lives, for the villagers came to confess: “This one is truly the savior of the world.”

Last Sunday we heard that the spiritual eyes of a blind man were opened in his encounter with Jesus, who had restored his eye sight; and he said to Jesus, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshipped him.

In today's Gospel lesson, Martha 's faith in Jesus led her to say, “Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, God's Son, the one who is coming into the world.” Lazarus received a new life. The lives of many who witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus were changed. They believed in Jesus. The people who experienced a “holy encounter” with Jesus were never the same. Their lives were changed and transformed.

Most likely, your lives have been changed too in your encounter with Jesus. It may not be once in a life-time experience. It may be a daily experience as you have a time of prayer and daily devotion. Your encounter with the Holy One may come through music. Or it may be an “Aha!” moment, when you feel the presence of God around you or when a some kind of enlightenment or understanding comes to you. Because of that experience, you are never the same as before. Some people experience a profound spiritual moment as they receive the bread and the cup. Encounters with the holy are often experiential, personal, spiritual, and emotional.

When I was in the beginning of my teen age, I thought I was perfect. I thought I was right in things if not in all. I tried to be the best I could be and do the “right” things in each situation. I lived on and acted on “should.” I should do this, I ought to be doing this, this is what I am expected to do, so I need to do it. ...And I was very critical of adults around me, especially my parents. (Now I sympathize with the parents of teenagers.) I thought: “They are not behaving or acting as good adults, setting examples for their children. And they are Christians!!! What they do is different from what they say.” I thought I was more pure and right and they were not good enough.”

As I got a couple of years older, the whole thing changed. I thought I was a very bad girl. I thought. "I can't be happy when my best friend got a better grade in English. She is my best friend who I like so much. Nonetheless, I am jealous. I can't rejoice with her, saying, "Etusko, you did a good job! Congratulations!" Who am I? I am not as kind person as I thought I was. I am not as good person as I thought I was. First Corinthians Chapter 13 says, 'Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. ' I am jealous, boastful and proud. I know the teaching of the Bible about God's forgiveness. If I tell my Sunday School teacher or my pastor about what I am feeling about myself, I bet they will say, "Jesus died on the cross for your sin. Your sin is already forgiven. God loves you," but I cannot accept it. Maybe God can forgive the sins of others, but not mine. I feel so terrible about myself."

Have you ever been unforgiving toward yourself? You just cannot forgive yourself for something you said or you did...maybe a long time ago. Every time you remember it, you feel terrible and feel ashamed. That's what I was feeling at that time.

One Sunday morning before going to church, I was remembering the altar call a visiting evangelist had offered at the revival meeting the night before. I wanted to stand up and go forward as other people did..., but I couldn't because I couldn't believe that God had forgiven my sin.

All of a sudden, the words of Jesus hit me in my head. "Don't be faithless any longer. Believe! Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

Do you recall those words of Jesus? Jesus spoke them to Thomas, who couldn't believe that Jesus had been resurrected because he had not seen him yet with his eyes.

"Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!" I knew God was speaking to me through those words of Jesus. I accepted God's forgiveness of my sin and of myself.

That moment ever changed my life. God encountered me in a way that made sense to me.

In a holy encounter God draws us closer to Godself. Jesus drew Nicodemus, the woman at the well and the blind man closer to him as they came to believe in him as their Living Water, Christ and Sight-Giver.

Jesus speaks to us still today through the words he spoke to Martha and waits for us to respond. "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"