

EXPECT DISCOMFORT

A Sermon for the Third Sunday after Easter, 2011

On the Text: Propers for the Day

By the Reverend Doctor Randolph Constantine

In Ecclesiastes 12:12 we read: **Of making many books there is no end.** Harried ministers look at that verse and say to themselves, “ Yes, and there is no end to the making of sermons either.” It is often hard for someone of a literal turn of mind to see the message in a verse or passage of Scripture even when it is sometimes scarcely below the surface. That happened to me with today’s Gospel lesson.

On Friday I received a gift of a sort. A nurse from my cardiologist’s office came to my house and brought me a little machine and some supplies and taught me how to do the test for determining my blood clotting time. Having this machine is a mixed blessing because each time this test is done, one of my fingers has to get pricked deeply enough to get a large drop of blood very quickly for the test to give an accurate result. Being taught how to do this required that I had to do the test on myself three times in less than an hour. As you might guess, that was not fun. However, it turned out to be necessary because I did not get a really good result until the third try. One thing you can say about that learning process is that it wasn’t comfortable.

There is however, a blessing in it. I no longer have to spend more than an hour to drive the 21 miles from my house to Mercy Hospital to get tested, wait around until they can find the time to do the test, which is going to hurt a little no matter who does the test, and then drive the 21 miles back home, burning up about 3 gallons of gasoline for the round trip. Now, I can just do the test and call in the results. I inflict the pain in my finger, which would happen anyway, but there is less pain in my wallet, and I don’t waste an hour or more in travel and waiting around.

What, you may well ask, does either of these things have to do with today, the Third Sunday after Easter? The answers to this question come from our Gospel lesson for today. Until I read Austin Farrer’s comment on today’s Gospel lesson, I could not see the message in that passage that lies just below the surface. In the first part of that lesson we heard this:

John 16:16-19 16 "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me." 17 So some of his disciples said to one another, "What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and,

'because I am going to the Father'?" 18 So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he is talking about." 19 Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, "Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me'?"

This may not have been clear to the disciples, but it is clear to us: Jesus is prophesying to the disciples that they won't see Him for a little while *after He is crucified*, but that after that little while, they will see Him again *after His Resurrection*. He just does not tell them in so many words, "You won't see me for a little while after I have been crucified." What is happening here is that the disciples have never comprehended, nor have they believed what Jesus said when He predicted His death and Resurrection, not even after He said it three times! Now, that is not the message that was hidden from me. What I could not see is in the last three verses of the lesson beginning at verse 20, where Jesus says:

John 16:20-22 20 Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. 21 When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. 22 So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

The message I saw in this was to the disciples. Jesus knew they did not understand what was to happen later that night and on the next day. The next day? Yes, the next day. St. John gives more attention to the events of Maundy Thursday than the other three Evangelists.

Just to put this story into context, we need to know when these events occurred. A brief look in the Bible will tell you this: Each of the first three Gospel writers has in his Gospel a description of the events of that day that begins with Jesus' telling the disciples how to find the place they will celebrate the Passover. St. John skips that and begins his account at the beginning of chapter 13 with the story of the foot washing. Here is something that some people might call trivia that tells us when the events of our Gospel lesson took place. If we look at the events between the time of Jesus' telling the disciples how to find the place where they will celebrate the Passover to the time when St. Peter denied Christ for the third time, we find this:

St. Matthew tells all of that in verses 17 through 74 of chapter 26 of his Gospel.

St. Mark tells his version of all that in verses 12-72 of chapter 14 of his Gospel.

St. Luke tell it in verses 7-62 of chapter 22 of his Gospel.

St. John begins his story of the events of that day and night in 13:1 and does not tell of St. Peter's third denial until 18:27. St. John takes 186 verses to tell the story of Maundy Thursday, while the most any of the other three take is 61 verses in St. Mark's account. Our Gospel lesson is in the middle of Chapter 16 of St. John's Gospel, which is right in the middle of St. John's account of Maundy Thursday. And at the end of our lesson, Jesus is telling them that they will be unhappy and sorrowful, but after a little while, they will see Him again, their hearts will rejoice and no one will take their joy from them. That is the story we see on the surface.

Austin Farrer saw a lot deeper than this in his little paragraph for the Third Sunday in Easter in his little book of paragraphs for the service of Holy Communion. He put it this way:

“When the disciples asked Christ to explain His departure and return, He did not explain the nature of these mysterious events; but He stated the principle or purpose of them. No birth, He said is without the pains of travail, but the birth of the child is worth the pains. Unless we agonize at some time over the birth of faith, faith is not ours; it is not a personal possession; it is not the child of our own soul. Christ leaves the disciples so far and so long as is required for the pains of their travail. It is not an act of desertion on His part, but a merciful providence. Darkness and uncertainty, loneliness and spiritual effort are necessary to us, and taken rightly, they are the growth of faith. They are as much the gifts of God as certainty and comfort. A little while He says, and I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice; your joy, no man taketh from you.

The deeper message that Farrer sees for the disciples and for us is that in order for anything worth-while to be gained, especially faith and salvation, we must expect travail, pains, and sorrow. I boil this down to, ... Expect Discomfort. Here I am using *discomfort* as a catch-all word for unease, pain, trouble, sorrow, anguish, hardship, distress, and tribulation. When we recognize that we have sinned a great sin, the feeling of guilt and contrition is not a warm feeling of comfort. We are in a condition of discomfort until we repent and confess that sin to God and ask Him for forgiveness, which we know He will give us if we truly repent.

I read something recently about forgiveness that talked about the discomfort of forgiveness; actually the word that was used was *hurt*. If your dog scratches a hole in someone's screen door as one of mine did once, somebody will be hurt because somebody will have to pay for the damage. If you say as I did, “Get somebody to fix that, and send me the bill.” you, or I, would

be paying for the mishap. If the owner of the house says, “Oh no, that’s OK. Just forget it.”, then the owner is taking the burden of payment off your shoulders and wallet and putting it on himself. So who owns the debt when we sin? We do. When Jesus tells us to forgive others, He is telling us to take upon ourselves the discomfort of paying the debt that we are owed.

Sin puts us in debt to God. But who paid off the debt of our Sin? Jesus did by giving His life in bloody pain on the Cross. He paid the debt and bore the discomfort of our sin. Out of that great discomfort and pain, of Jesus’ separation from God and then dying, came the blessing of our salvation. The debt was more than paid. Instead of just being debt-free, mankind became rich beyond measure with the priceless gift of eternal life with Jesus Christ as His brothers and sisters.

Let’s look at the story in our OT lesson, which tells us about what happened to King David after his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband Uriah. In the chapter preceding the one our lesson is in, we learn that after Uriah had died in battle, David took Bathsheba to be one of his wives, and she bore him a son, who had been conceived in the adultery. In our lesson we learn that God would not let the child live. The child became sick and in our lesson, we learned that that David fasted and prayed and wept, but to no avail; for the child died. It was only after the child had died did David get cleaned up and eat. Later, Bathsheba had another child; and that child lived, and was named Solomon. He became the wisest and richest King of Israel and built the first Temple in Jerusalem before he too fell into sin,

Here, even after the tribulation and discomfort arising from David’s sins, there came something good, the birth of Solomon, whom God also loved.

What is happening here? Does this mean that we should all go out and sin a lot so that good things will happen? I don’t think so. St. Paul answered that question a long time ago in Romans 6:1-2 [ESV Romans 6:1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?](#) No, we don’t need to try to sin. We all do too good a job at that without even trying. In fact, we keep on sinning when we try not to, and so did St. Paul. He said as much in Romans 7:15-20. You have all heard this before, but it is worth hearing again:

[15 I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. 17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me,](#)

that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

Can you see yourself in what he says: “I have desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.” I often tell people, if you want to see what a sinner looks like, look in a mirror! However, we know that because of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross we know that we have been redeemed, that the debt of our sin has been paid.

As we live our lives, we shall have ups and downs. We may do good things, and have good things happen to us; and we may do bad things and have bad things happen to us; but we may also do good things, and have bad things happen to us; or we may do bad things and have good things happen to us. Life’s like that, but in Romans 8:28, St. Paul tells us something amazing: 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ALL things work together for good for those who love God – all things – our good works, our failings, even our sins, although the fewer of those the better. So what we need to expect may surprise you. Even after something good or something bad, expect trouble, expect discomfort, but in any event, then expect the unexpected, expect something that is totally undeserved – Expect God’s Grace. AMEN!