

*SERMON: MARINATE ON THIS!*  
(Gospel of Luke 24:32)  
*Guest Preacher: Rev. Frank Johnson*  
April 11, 2010

Most of you know, I believe, that this church has a series of neighborhood groups, most of which meet on Sunday night once a month. The group that meets in our house has begun to read Open Christianity: Home by Another Road by Jim Burklo, who preached here a year ago, and who is a chaplain at USC. Jim challenges many of the precepts of traditional Christianity. For instance, he makes the claim that Jesus is not the only son of God. He goes on to explain that Jesus found God within himself, and that he taught the rest of us to find divinity at the core of our being.

This is who we are: God is within us, waiting for us to discover this truth. As theologian Richard Rohr says, *God comes to us disguised as ourselves!*

Two weeks ago I discovered a book called Tattoos on the Heart, Father Greg Boyle's account of his working with gangs in Los Angeles for over twenty years. Then yesterday morning, the Los Angeles Times published Patt Morrison's interview with the author. In the book Greg Boyle tells stories of the "homies," the affectionate name given to those young people who came out of gang life (and often out of prison) to work in Homeboy Industries, founded by Greg as the first step in finding a new life for themselves.

I will share a few of these stories, and we shall see that, as Jim Burklo has said, these homies had the experience of discovering God within themselves. Not a bad way to talk about resurrection. *Did not our hearts burn within us when he told us those stories?*

Here is one of Greg's stories: One day I get a phone call from a 25 year old homie named Cesar. I've known him most of his life, and I remember him as a little kid during the 1987 earthquake, when he wondered if the world was coming to an end. We agree to meet after work. He's just out of prison, where he's been more than he's been out since he was a little kid. He needs clothes, so we go to J.C. Penney and get him outfitted. He looks pretty menacing, and the folks in the store keep their distance.

"Do I look that scary?"

"Yeah, pretty much, Dog."

"I don't want to go back. I'm scared."

I try to reassure him that he'll be OK. I drop him off at his place and we say our good-byes. At three o'clock in the morning the phone rings. It's Cesar. He says what every homie says when he calls in the middle of the night: "Did I wake you?"

I always think: "Why no, I was just waiting and hoping that you'd call." I could sense Cesar's urgency.

"I gotta ask you a question: You know how I've always seen you as my father - ever since I was a little kid? Well I hafta ask you a question: Have ... I ... been ... your son?"

"Oh hell, yeah."

“Whew! I thought so.” Now his voice becomes enmeshed in a cadence of gentle sobbing.

“Then ... I will be ... your son. And you ... will be my father. And nothing will separate us, right?”

“That’s right.”

In this early morning call Cesar did not discover that he has a father. He discovered that he is a son worth having. The voice broke through the clouds of his terror and the crippling mess of his own history, and he felt himself beloved. God, wonderfully pleased in him, is where God wanted Cesar to reside.

There is a vastness in knowing you’re a son/daughter worth having. We see our plentitude in God’s expansive view of us, and we marinate on this. *Did not our hearts burn within us?*

What Cesar experienced helps us to understand what resurrection really means. It’s not so much something that happened to Jesus but doesn’t happen to the rest of us, as Jim Burklo reminds us. What Jesus discovered is for us to discover as well.

As Greg Boyle writes, “at Homeboy Industries we seek to tell each person this truth: They are exactly what God had in mind when God made them - and then we watch, from this privileged place, as people inhabit this truth. Nothing is the same again. No bullet can pierce this, no prison walls can keep this out. And death can’t touch it - it is just that huge. As people inhabit this truth. *Did not our hearts burn within us?*”

The same day on which I was introduced to Greg Boyle’s book we celebrated the Seder here in this room. The Seder is the Passover meal in which we remember our ancestors who escaped from slavery in Egypt. Right? Wrong! Listen to the words that we read together. “In every generation each of us should feel as though we ourselves had gone forth from Egypt ... Still we remember: it was we who were slaves ... we who were strangers ... We shall not oppress a stranger, for we know the feelings of the stranger, for we were strangers in the land of Egypt.” What is transforming in this celebration is the experience of becoming the slaves. It’s part of our DNA as the people of God.

The way Greg Boyle puts it is that we are called not just to help people but to go deeper and identify with them. We are called to Kinship. He tells the story of finding the words *WETBACK CHURCH* spray painted on the front of the church. He goes to a meeting that night and reports this, saying, “I’ll get one of the homies to clean it up.” Then Petra, one of the women there, said, “You will not clean that up.” That blew him away.

Petra continued, “You will not clean that up. If there are people in our community who are disparaged and hated and left out because they are *mojados* (“wetbacks”) ... then we shall be proud to call ourselves a wetback church.” Greg goes on to say that these women didn’t want just to serve the less fortunate; they were anchored in some profound oneness with them, and became them.

Greg continues, “Jesus and Petra are on the same page here. They chose a oneness in kinship and a willingness to live in others’ hearts ... Jesus didn’t champion the outcast, he was the outcast ... He became one with the outcast until they were welcomed or he was crucified, whichever came first!”

WHAT, THEN, IS THE MESSAGE OF EASTER?

GOD COMES TO US DISGUISED AS OURSELVES.

WE DISCOVER THAT WE ARE SONS AND DAUGHTERS WORTH HAVING.

MARINATE ON *THAT*!

WE'RE JUST WHAT GOD HAD IN MIND WHEN WE WERE CREATED.

LET'S INHABIT *THAT* TRUTH!

SO WE RECALL OUR DNA AND RESPOND TO GOD'S CALL TO KINSHIP.

*DID NOT OUR HEARTS BURN WITHIN US WHEN HE WAS WITH US?* (LUKE 24:32)

Amen.

