

Minding the Gaps

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The Reverend Elton O. Smith, Jr.

St. James' Episcopal Church, Potomac, MD

A particular memory keeps coming back to me from a recent trip to London, England, and traveling around that great city by their famous Underground system. The train door opens up and a voice from somewhere blares out with an authoritative reminder “Mind the Gap”, “Mind the Gap” Of course you know the voice is reminding us of the space between the train and the landing, but being a preacher it said something to me about my message for Easter. For when you think about it, that’s what Easter is all about—“Minding the Gaps.”

From the beginning of any time we know about, there have been gaps, divisions between God and humanity, brother and brother, young and old, the haves and have-nots, rich and poor, Christian and Muslim, Baptists and Catholics, those in power and those out of power—you name it. The ways that people have dealt with this are all too familiar— *either* we fight as hard as we can to get some kind of control, *or* we just give in and retreat into a familiar cubbyhole or neighborhood of life- *or*, hopefully, we are able to break through to new discoveries of life’s possibilities.

That breakthrough is what Easter is all about: that whatever the meteorological, cultural, or political weather of this Easter Day, we can, to echo St. Paul’s constant theme, “keep on hoping in our day,” because the barriers that divide us have been broken down by Jesus Christ. Real life is not to be defined by the gaps between us and our hope for a better world.

That possibility and hope certainly didn’t seem too realistic for Jesus’ followers who crept quietly to his tomb early in the morning and found that he was gone. An empty tomb is not much of a clue toward hope for the future, but even in their fright and despair the Church remembered the words, “he is going ahead of you on to Galilee”—out to the world beyond this place of death.

As time went on St. Paul and an increasing number of followers began to discern from their own experience that the Cross of Christ was not an end but a beginning of a new way of understanding and living life. They could look ahead with hope because the worst and the best in life, the pain and the possibility, the tragic and the triumphant, the

evil and the good, have been brought together on the Cross of Jesus Christ, and the dynamic of that convergence has given a new depth and meaning to life.

Most of the time, when we try to deal with life, we tend to oversimplify it, to eliminate the good or bad in our situation, and—depending on our point of view, to exclude something or somebody from our analysis or solution, so that in the short-term and short view it looks as if we can be in control by blocking something or somebody out of mind and heart.

But the world is not that simple. At the recent G20 Conference of global leaders in London, Prime Minister Gordon Brown of England could review what President Obama and the other leaders had accomplished and say that “the issues that people thought divided us did not divide us at all.” At the Conference that was remarkably true, but then in a different part of the world North Korea launches a nuclear missile and we know how closely we are bound together in a world where we constantly need the reminder, “Mind the Gaps.”

Whether it is world events or in your personal experience, I am more and more convinced that life itself is “cruciform” and that the Cross of Jesus Christ declares that the worst and the best, both the comfortable and the troublesome, must be considered in any solution that will last. Jesus’ death on a cross is not just an event in history to be remembered. We still look to the Cross on Calvary as a sign for our times as we “mind the gaps.”

Jesus Christ is still going ahead of us into the new Galilees of our time. There is always a “not-yet” quality to our lives and to the long-running serial story of the radiating power of the Cross penetrating into the events of history and into the events of our everyday, 2009, living. We can’t know the end of the history of mankind, but we know the nature of it. For illustration, in just two months we will remember the 65th anniversary of the World War II D-Day invasion of Europe. That day was not the end of the war, but now we recognize that from D-Day forward we could discern the nature of the final victory.

And it is from this Easter Day, the celebration of Christ’s living presence in all of life, that we can discover the nature of our future, and why we can keep on hoping in our day. It is from this Easter Day that we can discern how we can keep on growing the personal and global dimensions of the greatest truths about love and relationships that Jesus described for us in stories like the Prodigal Son, or the Good Samaritan—stories that remind us now how we can bridge the gaps that divide us.

That’s the best reason for our being here this morning, because we are seekers and searchers in “minding the gaps.” I said something like this before in a recent sermon

that an old and close friend of mine printed out from our website on the internet. He's a faithful member of the same church in Kansas City, Missouri, where he and his wife were married 59 years ago. He startled me by circling "seekers and searchers", and writing on the margin "I've never been one of those." And further he noted, "Wrong. The people who keep your church going are those who are there because it's where they're supposed to be."

Well, what do you think about that? I called him later and pointed out that statistics show that unless we are meeting the spiritual needs of new people coming into our midst, the Christian Church will gradually decline. There's always a not-yet quality to what we do, but I am confident that the life of St. James' is shaped to welcome the seekers and the searchers in the world around us.

On this feast of Easter, the days of Lent are over when we symbolically awaited Jesus' resurrection by omitting the "Alleluias" as our services concluded. But now that season of preparation is ended, and we can go out from here this morning "telling it on the mountain" so that the entire world can hear it from us, "Jesus Christ is risen, he is risen indeed. Alleluia!! Alleluia!!"