

Holy Week Preaching

Can We Handle the Resurrection?

Who can handle resurrection homiletically? You and I know we have our hands, not to mention our minds, hearts, and nerves full just handling preaching . . . In order to handle resurrection, we must be handled by resurrection.

Peter Gomes preached one of the most fascinating and moving sermons on resurrection I have ever heard. When he was done, I made my way around the side of the church to be one of the first ones to greet him as he exited. I embraced him and whispered, "That's one of those sermons that makes me glad that I am a preacher." In his sermon, he proposed that resurrection was a continuing event which involves everyone who dares be involved with it. He said, "Easter is not just about Jesus, it's about you. Jesus has already claimed his new life. What about you? Easter is not just about the past, it's about the future. Your best days are ahead of you. The proof of the resurrection is in your hands and in your life."

Handling the resurrection is challenging; being handled by the resurrection is even more challenging. In Alaine Alsire's novel, Lazarus' problem was not being raised; his problem was being raised 'different.' He was not the same person. Christian resurrection is not just about coming back to life, but coming back to life 'different.' We don't do *different* well. In social relations, all too often we interpret different as deficient. We even resist different thoughts; it has been estimated that 90 percent of the thoughts anyone thinks on any given day are the same as those of the day before.

Being handled by the resurrection means constantly challenging our fear of the unknown, and even more, according to Anthony De Mello, constantly challenging our fear "of the loss of the known." Being handled by the resurrection means learning to relax in the experience of new life. May we enter with God into the work of changing and recomposing our lives. May we rise and cheer such resurrections.

—Kirk Byron Jones, author of *The Jazz of Preaching* and editor of *The African American Preaching Library* (available June 2006.)

Jesus' Mother

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home." John 19:26-27

Perhaps the most enigmatic episode in this section of John is the conversation of Jesus from the cross with the Beloved Disciple and Jesus' mother. This story is unique to John. It's meaning has been variously debated. Some would take it literally as a poignant story telling how Jesus saw to it that his mother would be cared for after his death. However, both the Beloved Disciple and Jesus' mother are given symbolic roles elsewhere in John's Gospel. An often repeated interpretation is that Jesus' mother here represents the church, which has now been given into the safekeeping of the Beloved Disciple, who would here symbolize the leadership of John's Christian community.

I propose another interpretation. In the only other story where the mother of Jesus appears, in the story of the wedding feast at Cana (2:1-11), she has a role as one who participates in bringing about the mission of Jesus. She is not like other characters in John who have to go through a process of faith: she is already in the know. In fact, she operates virtually as a partner in Jesus' ministry on that occasion at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Now at the end of his ministry, when he is about to depart, he entrusts his "partner" to the Beloved Disciple. In doing so, he symbolically appoints the Beloved Disciple to be the agent of his mission on earth in his absence. In this sense, the Beloved Disciple becomes symbolic of pastoral leadership in the church in any generation. His role at the foot of the cross is to interpret events correctly, utilizing the spiritual insight symbolized by the mother of Jesus, an insight made accessible to succeeding generations by the stories presented in this very Gospel.

—Michael Williams, *The Storyteller's Companion to the Bible*, Volume 10 (Abingdon Press, 1996)