

April 15, 2012 / 2 Easter B
by Paul F. Bosch

+ + +

Let me tell you about
the Great Syracuse University Streak of 1973.

Do some of you know
what streaking is?
Did they do streaking in Canada?

This was a craze in the early 1970's --
before you were born! --
among young people, mostly University students,
where groups of kids took off all their clothes
and ran like crazy – streaked – through public places.

I don't remember it being a protest of any kind;
I think it was just youthful high spirits.

Anyhow, it's a balmy day in March,
unseasonably hot for that time of year.

It's about 1:30 in the afternoon,
and I am just emerging from my office
at the Chapel at Syracuse University
where I've been Lutheran Chaplain
for more than a dozen years.

As I come out from the Chapel
I'm stunned to see several hundred students
gathered there on the grassy quadrangle
in front of the Chapel.

"What's going on?" I ask.
Someone nearby says,
"Don't you know?
It's the day of the Great Syracuse Streak."

Sure enough, as I stand there,
only steps from my office door,

a great cheer explodes from the crowd,
and looking up I see
perhaps a dozen male students,
dressed only in sneakers,
dashing along the length of the rooftop parapet
above the Arts Building.

Well, that isn't to be the end of it.
No sooner have they disappeared on the roof top
than there's a second streak:
half a dozen male students are streaking naked
across the roof of the Physics building
to a great cheer from the multitude.

And now – good grief! --
here on the ground,
right beside me,
another young man,
and – good grief! – a young woman,
are taking off all their clothes,
removing even their shoes, and presently
they streak right by my elbow
to great cheers from the crowd,
all the way to the end of the Quad,
turn around, and head back to their clothes,
passing right by me again.

Now you should understand
I am wearing my clerical collar,
and I take some moments to get in touch
with my own feelings.

What's going on in me?
I ask myself.

Well, there is certainly high good humour
here in the crowd.
Everyone, including the streakers,
seems to be having a wonderful time,
laughing and joking.
And I find myself joining in the laughter.

But there's a certain fear inside me as well:
Will the cops come to bust us all?
And me with my collar on.
I can see the headlines now:
"Lutheran chaplain arrested with naked revelers."

And,
I have to admit it to myself,
there's a certain amount of envy in me,
jealousy even.
It does look like fun.
As one student told me later,
you don't often get the chance,
in our society,
to run around outside
and feel the wind on your bare backside.
On your face, yes, but not on your gluteals!

But there is something else inside me
that I don't expect to find:
a feeling of pity, of sadness, of poignancy.
These kids are so vulnerable
as they make their dash past my elbow.

I want to be able to reach out and cover them up,
to give them something to wear,
not just against the chill of that March day
and the thorns and the stones in their path,
but emotionally and psychologically as well.

These kids were too exposed,
too vulnerable.
There was something too humiliating about it,
for them, in my reading of it.

Now all of this takes me to the Gospel for the Day,
believe it or not.

Jesus appears to his disciples
the week after his resurrection,

and he does two things:

- 1) He shows them his wounds
in his hands and feet and his side.
- 2) And he gives them the gift of peace.

Let's look at each of these gifts.

- 1) First I see Jesus' vulnerability here
before his friends:
He shows them his wounds.

He does not hide his wounds and his scars
from his friends.
He precisely shows them to them.
He stands resurrected before them,
his body brilliant with new life,
but still he bears the marks of his wounding.

Now that's instructive to me
about the life of faith.

Jesus is precisely not Superman here;
he is precisely not Rambo.
He is the Wounded Healer,
in Henri Nouwen's provocative phrase.

This has the effect of doing two things.

- A) It reminds me of God's own acceptance of me,
precisely as I am,
without qualifications, without conditions.

God in Christ accepts me
"just as I am, without one plea."
Without perfection,
with all my weaknesses,
with all my handicaps,
with all my wounds and vulnerabilities.

That's good news indeed.

Jesus shows his wounds here,

and reassures me that
I do not have to be perfect for God to love me,
for God to accept me.

That's a message you've heard in this church
for 45 years,
in prayers and hymns and anthems, and
from three terrific pastors.
We should remember that,
on an anniversary Sunday.

B) And there's another effect of this gesture:
Jesus showing his wounds to his friends
encourages me to do the same,
that is, to show my wounds to you.

In fact, you could argue that
that is the definition of a friend:
A friend is someone you can show your wounds to,
without fear of being rejected.

A friend is someone who knows you as you are,
with all your wounds and weaknesses,
and who still loves you anyway,
still accepts you anyway, as you are.

A friend is someone before whom you can take the risk
of being vulnerable.

A friend is someone like God in that respect:
loving you, accepting you

It's no secret to you
that we're not living in what you might call
the Constantinian era any more,
the era of Christendom --
that 1700 year period
when the Christian church had

without qualification, without condition,
in spite of your wounds and weakness.

OK. That's first. Jesus shows his wounds.
It's A) a picture for us of the love of God
and B) a model for us of how we are to love
and accept each other.

2) This is second:
Jesus grants his followers peace.
"Jesus came and stood among them
and said 'Peace be with you'."

That's not so remarkable to me
until you think of some other gifts
Jesus could have given, and didn't.

A) Think for a moment
of what Jesus does not offer us.

He does not offer, for example,
success in this world:
Success in my job,
success as a church,
big numbers, prestige, popularity.

That's probably worth remembering today
here at Christ Church,
in our Anniversary celebration.

enormous success, and power, and popularity.

And we'd love to be assured by Jesus
that power and popularity like that in the world
can make a difference.

But Jesus does not promise that.
Jesus does not promise privilege,
or prosperity, or power,
or any of a whole host of qualities

I might have expected.

No, Jesus promises peace,
gives us peace in his resurrection appearance.

Earlier in the Gospel of John,
Jesus prays for unity among his friends.
Here, he grants them peace.
Peace and unity.
Unity and peace.
They're gifts I might not have chosen for myself.

They're relational gifts, aren't they?
They're gifts for people in relationship,
for people in the relationship that constitutes marriage,
in relationship that constitutes a friendship,
in relationship that constitutes a community,
like this one, like a church.

They're gifts which will make a difference
not so much for me as an individual,
or you as an individual,
like popularity or success,
but for us all in relationship.

I like to think of the Christian life
as an open-ended adventure,
a continuing improvisation that's never closed,
never determined,
never all planned out.

For a life like that you need Jesus' gift of peace,
peace in relationship.

B) I love that gesture of peace
that was re-introduced into our worship
in the green book.

When I was a kid, we didn't have it in our worship.
My Dad was a pastor, and he'd say,
"The peace of the Lord be with you",

and we'd all answer "And also with you."

But we didn't do anything.
We'd just stand there.

Now, the worship orders of most Christian churches
include the possibility
of a gesture at those words:
a handshake, an embrace.

One of my teachers would say that
after the prayers in the Holy Communion,
we have the chance
to touch,
to embrace
what we've just prayed for,
namely, each other,
with all our wounds and weaknesses,
all our vulnerabilities
and handicaps.

When we greet each other in the Peace,
we're not just chatting up a friend.

What we're doing is
re-capitulating the 20th Chapter of John's Gospel.

We're announcing God's own gift of peace
and unconditional acceptance
and unqualified love to each other.

It's a moment in our worship, that is,
when our Gospel, our Good News,
is actualized among us.
Not just spoken of,
but actually acted out.

And when we actually touch each other,
perhaps embrace each other,
with all our wounds,
then Christ stands again in our midst.

I become Christ to you.
You become Christ to me.

Now that's a moment worth getting out of bed for
on a Sunday morning.

+ + +