The Third Sunday of Easter

Luke 24:36b-48

A sermon given by Pastor Elaine Hewes

St. Brendan Episcopal Church 4-18-21

As we acknowledged at the beginning of worship this morning, we gather together today holding in one space both the joyful Easter proclamation of Love's power over death **and** the grief that is ours with the loss of our dear Peter Antich, who died the day after Easter.

A friend once told me that when someone dear to us dies, the depth of our grief is equal to the depth of our love for that person… So truly our grief this morning runs deep, for Peter was deeply loved by those of us in the St. Brendan community, by his many friends, and most particularly by his family.

It is in the depth of such grief that we gather this morning listening for the sound of an Easter word that rings **true** in the midst of loss and sorrow… an Easter word that sounds **"authentic"** in the face of grief and death…

And because such a word is often times difficult to hear in the midst of a culture that urges us either **to move quickly** from "heartbroken" to "happy" or **to settle** for some "dull coping, devoid of all hoping," I am very grateful this morning for a poem Peter Antich "the son" wrote about his father in the days after his death, a poem he entitled "Pieces"… A poem that both acknowledges the raw truth of grief and offers the possibility of something else in the midst of it…

A poem that begins this way…

I'm trying to pick up the pieces now –
That's what the idiomatic wisdom of American
English calls it –
We pick up the pieces after a loss.

It's a cliché of course,
But that's just it:
What is a cliché, if not a rash bid to pick
up a few pieces?

I don't want to just pick up pieces and stack
them in a pile, though.
The challenge isn't collection; it's coherence.
What I mean is, nothing quite fits together
at the moment.

What happened to the pieces anyway?
Did you smash them when you left?
No, you were never wanton.
And really, no one broke the thing;
It just fell apart.

Perhaps it's that pieces are missing, that you

took some with you.

That much is true: there are pieces missing.

Look at this piece for example: its edges are

empty, and

You can tell just by looking what piece should

go there.

I know just the piece.

But I can't pick up that piece.

I can't even find it…

Peter-the-poet-son continues his poem then with this image of puzzle pieces, acknowledging in his father's absence that the pieces aren't sticking, aren't holding together; that some of them seem to have changed, that they are all out of order, that the whole border has changed, that there isn't room to fit them all anymore; that he has to find room for them somewhere for clarity's sake, but doesn't know how…

It is such an apt description of what real grief feels like after the death of a loved one… pieces of a puzzle, of a life, that are suddenly lost, don't fit, can't hold together… Peter-the-poet-son refusing in his poem to move from the chaos of those scattered, lost and misfit pieces to something easily reassembled, redeemed, made whole… Choosing instead to pick up a few pieces, "like flowers fallen from the stem," and to arrange them in a vase "for you," as he says, speaking to his father…

The remainder of Peter's poem being a description of what he sees when he looks at various pieces of his family's life… like the image of his father sitting on the porch of the house on Little Deer Isle, napping or watching the birds… like the image of the entire family building sand castles and eating popovers with extra jam or a la mode… like the image of his father offering a hug when a reprimand would have been a more apt response… (Or my personal favorite; the puzzle piece that Peter the poet describes this way… *"Us,"* he writes, *"you reading the Lord of the Rings to me. Gandolph had just fallen into Moria, and I couldn't believe it, couldn't imagine making do without him, much less going to sleep after that. But you were merciful, told me to have hope, that things may not be what they seem.).*

The poet son, in the end, coming to a piece of the puzzle that was part of Peter-the-father himself… offered just two weeks before his death… a reflection he gave in a Lenten Vespers on the word "home", saying in his sharing that "home is the place where we learn what love is… the place where we learn that we are beloved… the first place we are hurt by someone we love and learn for forgive… the place that first leads us to God…"

Peter-the-poet-son then ending his poem this way…

I confess, I cannot pick up the pieces, and,

it's true, there's no need to rush.

But I think, I hope, that

Something is coming near to me,

Far away still

Calling in your words,

Something that one by one is

Calling up every piece to itself,

And making them whole,

Just as you called me up into a home.

Peter the son, in these final lines I think, suggesting that just as his father called him into a home (many of the pieces of that home now scattered and lost and waiting to find their way back into something whole), so too does something from far away call those pieces into itself … something coming near… something that even now is offering the hope of coherence, of pieces gathered and made whole… something we might call "love" or "God" or "mystery" or "mercy" or "beauty" or…

Making this poem a poem for anyone who may be grieving any loss at any time… and offering an **authentic** Easter word… a **truthful Easter** word spoken in the midst of the broken, misfit, scattered pieces of anyone's and everyone's life…

And, in a strange and beautiful way, echoing the very Gospel proclamation Luke was trying to offer his marginalized, dis-spirited Christian community in the late first century as he told the stories of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to the disciples… Those disciples standing amongst the broken, scattered pieces of their lives in the aftermath of Jesus' crucifixion and death and the strange unbelievable stories of the women and those in Emmaus who said they had experienced the presence of the risen Christ…

All of those impossible, incomprehensible pieces of the disciples' lives scattered amongst all the questions of what they were to do next **with Rome still firmly in charge** and the supposedly "risen" Jesus **still decidedly absent** in any way that might suggest some glorious completed and coherent Easter puzzle with Jesus shining at the center, Rome banished to the sidelines and the angel choirs singing from heaven above…

The story of Jesus' post-resurrection appearance as told in our Gospel text for this morning suggesting something very different… something that rings **truer** and **more authentic** to the grief we feel for so many reasons this morning, among them the death of our dear Peter, certainly… but also the grief we feel for all those who have died of the Coronavirus and their loved ones, for all those who are still suffering the effects of the virus… the grief we feel for the victims of incessant gun violence and rampant racism… the grief we feel for our Mother Earth… the grief we feel for our own children, our own families, our own addictions and failures and unrequited regrets…

In the midst of all these griefs… all these broken and scattered pieces of our lives, this morning's story of Jesus' post resurrection appearance tells the story of the love whose essence will be known most profoundly by its promise to be present **inside** the brokenness…

A love made known through its wounds ("Look at my hands and feet," the risen Jesus said to the disciples… "see that is I myself.") … a love made known through its ordinary, earthy, incarnate, tangible, flesh and bone body… ("Touch me and see… For a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.")

All of this inviting us to look for the risen Christ in the ordinary flesh and bone days of our own lives… in the wounds and the broken pieces we fear may never cohere; may never come together into

something whole… Our Gospel text for this morning inviting us to see that that's where love lives and moves and has its being because any other kind of love is not love at all…

This is not where we might first think to look for signs of Easter… in the broken pieces of our lives. But if the Christian faith insists on anything, it insists upon this… Love's promise to be with us through it all; even in those times and places deemed "God forsaken" … and inviting us then to recognize the presence of the risen Christ in times and places we would never expect…

Bringing to mind for me my favorite Easter saying of all time… an **authentic** Easter word offered by Pastor Kate Braestrup, chaplain for the Maine Warden Service, whose husband Drew was killed some years ago in a high-speed chase in his duty as a Maine State Trooper, leaving Kate to raise her children without their father, without her beloved husband…

Kate saying, in the outpouring of love and support shown to her in her excruciating time of loss and grief… "Sometimes Easter is the resurrection of love alongside the unchanged fact of death."
"Sometimes Easter is the resurrection of love alongside the unchanged fact of death."

And what I want to say in light of Peter-the- son's poem entitled "Pieces," is that I think a few of the pieces of Kate Braestrup's shattered and scattered life after the death of her husband must have cohered, must have come together with all the resurrections of love that were made tangible and real for her in the devastation of her grief…

Not all the pieces mind you… Maybe not even all that many… But some of them… Enough for her to sense in those resurrections of tangible, visceral, incarnate, accompanying suffering love something she called "Easter."

Perhaps this is how Easter comes to us this morning as we hold in one space both the joyful Easter proclamation of Love's power over death **and** the grief that is ours with the loss of our dear Peter Antich… Perhaps Easter comes as each of us, all of us, acknowledge the shattered, scattered pieces of our lives, and reach out to one another in accompanying suffering love through it all… hoping, trusting that something is coming near to us, from far away still… And yet something as near to us as the air we breathe … something that from **alongside** and **inside** the broken pieces, the lost pieces, the misfit pieces, is calling up every piece to itself, one by one and making them whole….

Not all of them mind you… Not all of them, this side of the river… Maybe not even all that many of them at any given time… But a few… Enough of them for us to know that Love is rising even now, alongside and inside the unchanged fact of death, and calling us to open our hearts and our eyes and our ears and our lives to Love's presence, so we too might be resurrections of love in our broken world… in our shattered and scattered world… in our Good Friday world…

So we too might become resurrections of incarnate love in the name of the one in whose body all of creation coheres and all of God's children, just like our dear Peter, know home. Amen.