

REFLECTION
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The Reverend Dr. Phebe L. McPherson

Luke 24:36b-48

Jesus himself stood among the disciples and said to them, “Peace be with you.”
They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them,
“Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet;
see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

How many times have you heard this said, or said this yourself—*This past year has been unreal*. Unreal—lacking in reality, substance, or genuineness. Artificial. Illusory. And *time*, our steady stream of consciousness, seems to have been distorted, too. Perhaps, this global sense of imbalance has happened because we just can’t comprehend this much loss, this much sorrow, this much change. And the violence that has ensued.... It baffles our minds and causes us to doubt our senses and even our emotions to tell us what is real. Or, maybe because of the pandemic and racial violence, we have had time and opportunity to see what only seems unreal and finally name it—the immorality of the culture we live in. Maybe, just maybe, our sense of reality was mistaken and we are just now waking up. The truth remains— we just can’t process so much sorrow, so much loss, and so much change. And so much chaos. If you thought there was a center of gravity—it has been shaken. This imbalance may lead us to a better way.

There is an enlightening article in the most recent *New Yorker*, “The Politics of Feeling.” (Merve Emre, April 19, 2021) It calls into question our liberal belief that we can control our environment if only we learn to personal skills, and upgrade our “Emotional Intelligence.” Remember Golman’s book, *Emotional*

Intelligence? It is now in its 25th-anniversary edition, selling over 5 million copies, and promising its readers self-betterment at work and at home, and a better world when we learn to “control and channel our urges.” There is even a version for children ages 3 to 11—*Emotionally Intelligent Ninja*. It’s very alluring. Some treat the series of “Emotional Intelligence” books like a Bible. But over the past year, we have awakened to many impenetrable, concrete societal factors that make Goleman’s work “out of touch” and “beside the point.” Systemic injustice, violence, hatred, fear, poverty, hopelessness. Goleman’s self-help genre tells only half of the story, if that. Only half of the reality. What is really real? What really shapes our society and our lives?

Why do I bring this up? Because if you dig into the Gospel lesson we just heard read, you will find that Luke also seems to be wrestling with these same issues — and tries to help the Christian community grapple with their loss, and sorrow and change — Tries to help them understand what is really real. And what matters most in the way they live their lives and shape their community of faith. His answer is not a program or a project. His answer is a person and a relationship. Real as flesh and bones, hands and feet, and life-giving as breath itself. “How is it that Jesus is with us?” asked the first century congregation. “What is real? What is really real. It’s not enough that the tomb was empty. It’s not enough to merely proclaim Christ is risen! We need to experience his real presence among us. Real as our own flesh and bones. Real as hands and feet. More real than injustice, violence, hatred, fear, poverty, hopelessness—and even death. We need him here. Now. We need him

with us as we gather around the table. Real. Of substance. Genuine. Giving substance and meaning to our lives. Showing us who he is and who we are!

Luke showed them. He showed them the *real presence* of Jesus who walked with his disciples on the road to Emmaus. Luke showed them the *real presence* when Jesus offered them peace and stayed with them for a meal. “*Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.*” And in the 22nd chapter, Luke shows them, and we hear the echo of the church’s earliest sacramental experience in what we have come to call, “*The Real Presence*” —as the Church gathers and breaks bread together.

And he took bread, and gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. (Luke 22)

What is really real? The answer is not *what* but *who*. Who is more real than injustice, violence, hatred, fear, poverty, hopelessness—and even death? Who walks with us, stays with us, has “pitched his tent,” has made a home with us? Who walks not only with us, but with all those who call upon him for mercy and justice? It’s not *what* are we to be as followers of Christ, but *who* we are to follow and who we are we to be.

I wrote this a few years back....*The Really Really You*. I hope it helps as we continue to grapple with loss, and sorrow and change—and use this time as a *real opportunity* to know the presence of Christ and follow him in the here and now.

DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE,

who you really, really are?

You're not in your elbow, your ankle or knee,
not your blue jeans or your super-cool tee.

I don't mean to ask about great grandfather Lou,
or why your hair is that strange color blue,
if you drive a fast car,
if you won the big race,
if you've always come in second
and never first place.

Have you mama's bright eyes or papa's sixth toe?
You may be those things, but you're much more,
don't you know?

THE REALLY, REALLY YOU

got underway,

in a special place, one very special day.

You were three months old, or six, or eight.

Your age doesn't matter, it's never too late.

You were dressed to your toes in cotton and lace,
and the priest splashed water all over your face!

You were startled, surprised, but before you knew,
IT HAPPENED!

in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, too.

IT WAS IN THAT MOMENT

when you were looking around

and the priest made a *cross* with oil on your crown,
and whispered these words in a soft-sort-of-tone,

You are marked forever as Jesus Christ's own.

It was just before you let out that holler,

that woke up the deacon who then popped his collar.

That's when it happened, on that long ago day
that your parents have pictures of tucked somewhere away.

THE REALLY, REALLY YOU HAS BEEN GIVEN A CALL,
for God loves and needs you no matter how small.
So with Christ in your heart, your ankle and knee,
your elbow, your blue jeans and your super-cool tee,
with Christ in the middle, above and behind,
you've got what you need to be loving and kind.

SO LIFT UP YOUR FACE, YOUR EYES AND YOUR HEART,
for NOW is the time and you're ready to start.
On the shoulders of God you can see what is right,
you can see we're all ONE from up at that height.

REMEMBER GOD'S PEOPLE,
wherever you are,
at school, at play, at home or afar.
Tackle the challenges without fret or fear
with the courage to will and to persevere.
In soup kitchens, hospitals, with prisoners or strangers,
in battlefields, in hard times, with people in dangers.
Let's hear that holler, whatever you do,
'CAUSE CHRIST IS ALIVE IN THE REALLY, REALLY YOU!