

# Easter 5

**Acts 11:1-18**

**Psalm 148**

**Revelation 21:1-6**

**John 13:31-35**

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It is good to be home. I had a delightful time at the conference on Spirituality and Photography. My particular workshop lead was Jon Kral. The first photograph I saw was titled "Happy."

It's a portrait of a grizzly faced man wearing a canvas hat, and goggles, face turned  $\frac{3}{4}$  profile, cheeks slightly pushed back. I recognize the setting immediately, the background is a field, you can see the swirling cloud behind the tail of the crop duster. It's a wonderful photograph. Then someone asked where Jon where he was when he took the photograph. He sort of stammered a bit before answering: *Tied to the front of the airplane!* I thought: *This is going to be some sort of workshop.*

Jon Kral began his photography career as a photo journalist in Florida; he is well known for his exposé of Florida Cowboys, his portraits and his unique use of light. It was his use of light that attracted me. Photography is simply using the tools we have to balance light to capture an image. The tools are shutter speed, how much time the film or sensor is exposed to light, and aperture, how big the hole through which light comes through the lens is. Shutter speed will also effect things like motion, aperture will also effect things like how much of the image is in focus. Balance those two and you will capture the image you are looking for ~ if ~ you have the right IOS. IOS is the measure of how sensitive to light the film or sensor is. Choose the right ISO, can you can balance the light as you see the image. Choose the wrong ISO and balance won't do the trick.

This triangle of shutter speed, aperture and ISO is an interesting metaphor for life. Much of life is balancing the conflicting demands with the tools, the life skills, we have. The ISO is righteous relationship with the divine; trust that God loves you loves all creation, having faith that Jesus has provided a path of salvation for you, a path of salvation for all creation. When you have a righteous relationship with the divine, your use of life's tools yields surprising hopeful results.

This does not mean that there will not be hardship and tragedy; it does mean how we respond to those particular moment in life, will be profoundly different and strangely peaceful. If you do not have a righteous relationship with the Divine, your use of life skills ~ well ~ no matter the result one finds life lacking.

We all know this is so, because we all **know** what trust in God and faith in Jesus looks like, ~ right? May be not after all the flavors of Christian traditions bests Baskin Robin's a thousand to 1. Part of the variety of Christian flavors is different preferences about righteous relationship. Most comes from changes in the nature of righteous relationship. This change is seen in scripture. The first two thirds of scripture, the Old Testament, makes no mention of Jesus at all. The last third, the New Testament dramatically, **totally** changes the nature of righteous relationship with the Divine.

We see an aspect of this change in the reading from Acts this morning. After Jesus' resurrection, after his appearance to the disciples, they finally understand what Jesus has been teaching the last three years. Their sharing the story of Jesus and his teachings attracts lots of people. Some are Jews, who understand Jesus to be the expected messiah, just in a totally unexpected manner. Others are gentiles, and remember a gentile is any one not a Jew. Righteous gentiles raises significant questions.

- Do followers of Jesus have to be Jews?
- Do the men have to be circumcised?
- Do they have to follow the Law?
- Do they have to follow dietary rules,

which are part of Levitical Purity Law?

Peter's vision is a collection of all the animals Levitical Purity Law names as unclean. He is told to eat them. He responds *No way, will I eat what is unclean!* The voice replies: *What God has made clean, you must not call profane.* Peter obeys the vision setting in motion enormous upheaval, changing the very foundation of what it means to be in righteous relationship with God.

There are earlier examples in Scripture, we can look at them in another setting. History reveals continuing examples of change in understanding righteous relationship with God. When Roman persecution of Christians got extremely severe many Christians renounced their belief in God and Jesus. After the persecutions were over, many went back to their Christian community seeking to renounce their renouncement, and to be reunited with the community. This caused great tension among Christians. Some said no! Once you've renounced God in Jesus it's done—a fait accompli. Others said there is this amazing grace in God and that through some proper process people could reclaim their trust in God's love, their faith in salvation through Jesus. The last of these great changes in righteous relationship was the Reformation. Some like Brian McLaren and Phyllis Tickle, believe we are in the middle of a similar upheaval, and are in some stage of coming to grips with an emerging new righteous relationship to the Divine. For the last 60 years, the Anglican Communion, in a debate whose roots are in the Reformation questions:

Is it proper to have Scripture in a language other than Latin?

Is it proper to conduct worship in a language other than Latin? struggled with the propriety of indigenous priests and bishops. The Episcopal Church, for the last 30 or 40 years, has been struggling the propriety of women priests and bishops. This has been legislatively settled for some time and is a growing, but not yet universally accepted ideal. The debate is working its way through other provinces of the Anglican Communion, and even other denominations, an example is the contention about women's ordination in the Roman Catholic tradition. We are all aware of the debate about sexuality and marriage which has its real roots in the question of righteous relationship with the Divine.

On a more local level, here, in north east Arkansas we are faced with the challenge: How do we be a trusting community of faith in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the Episcopal tradition, in Blytheville, possibly the together with Calvary in Mississippi County. At the moment we are in a process of deciding which ministries we are called to financially support. We still have the question of: How to be a trusting community of faith in our worship and beyond? And we know in our bones, even if it's only whispered, a change is coming.

*How to be a trusting community of faith in 21<sup>st</sup> century in Episcopal tradition here? How to be a trusting faith community in our worship and beyond?* are not easy questions. I do not know the answers. I do know, trust in God's love, and faith in salvation through Jesus will reveal answers, likely surprising, even disconcerting in shape and source. I also know such discerning means taking risks big risks, risks a big as Peter took in accepting and proclaiming his vision, which changed the nature of righteous relationship with the divine in every-day life ~ forever.

Jon Kral took a risk, in allowing self to be tied to front of air plane and caught a wonderful photograph. What risk will you take that will allow you to catch a wonderful glimpse of the new heaven of the new earth.