

Easter Day
Church of the Good Shepherd, Silver City, NM

April 20, 2014
Rev. Paul Moore

Galilee

We are Galilee. A couple of years ago when Karisse and I were lining up to visit Silver City for the very first time, one of our members told me on the phone about how to get here. She said, "Nobody goes to Silver City by accident!" It is true, we sit 50 miles north of I-10, and 200 miles south of I-40. We are almost equidistant from Albuquerque, El Paso and Tucson. We are in a kind of borderland.

Borderlands are in the spaces between things. The area spans 5 distinct ecological zones. From Chihuahuan desert to Douglas fir, in this area you can find animals that are endemic to the tropics and the arctic, to the new world and the old, to highlands and lowlands. We sit, really, between a lot of things. We're between the mines and the wilderness, the ranches and the farms, the desert and the mountains, Mexico and the United States, and Mexican culture and northern New Mexican Hispanic culture. We are in many ways a mixing bowl of a hundred different things.

Metropolitan centers have an identity. They exist for a purpose, and people go there for that purpose. It's like they have a well-developed community ego. Borderlands are in-between. In-between does not mean nothing happens here: On the contrary, during the summer it's impossible to take all the activities in that go on here. We've been named one of the 20 best places to retire in the United States, and one of the 10 best places to live. One of our chefs got nominated as the best chef in the Southwest. Living in a borderland forces you to hold different points of view in the same field of view. It drives you deeper than ego, our mixing-bowl makeup cannot afford much ego, so we live by the creative, ever-surprising fount of energy we call spirit.

Maybe one of the reasons I like it here is that I, too, am a mixing bowl. I am the son of Protestant missionaries, and I now worship in a catholic tradition. My ancestry is British, Irish, Scot and German, yet I grew up in Latin America. I speak 3 languages, and with some practice, can read ancient Greek. I have lived in the north and in the south, in the highlands and in the lowlands, in temperate zones and tropics. But I am really no different than anyone else in this Church this morning. Each of us has a story that we can tell, and probably more than one version of it. Each of us can see ourselves as a kaleidoscope of vistas, a symphony of sounds, a welter of experiences. We are all borderlands, and in those sometimes-neglected in-between spaces unexpected life sometimes breaks forth.

In Jesus' day Galilee and its people were like us. It stood between the Jewish south and the Greek north. Many people spoke both Aramaic and Greek. Major trade routes from Europe, the Middle East and Africa converged there. Roman governors had built magnificent palaces and arenas there. And at the same time it wasn't really any one thing more than another. The Greeks saw it as corrupt, too mixed with Roman and Jewish influences, and the Jews saw it as the hick country to the north, far removed from important centers of worship and education. Nazareth was in Galilee, where Jesus grew up. When Andrew went to find Nathaniel to tell him about Jesus, Nathaniel retorted, "Nazareth, can anything good come from there?" Galilee represented the ferment of the borderlands, not fully one thing or another, despised by the purists, but often the source of great richness. Virgilio Elizondo in his book, Galilean Journey, (Orbis Books, 2000) likens the area between San Antonio Texas and the border with Mexico (an area not unlike our own) to Galilee. He notes that here, in the mix, in the unruly borderlands, is where Jesus appears.

In the Gospel lesson for today two women go to the tomb of Jesus. They have witnessed his cruel crucifixion, they have noted where his body was laid by Joseph of Arimathea, and they have come to anoint the body of Jesus with the prescribed herbs for burial. But they have also seen the stone rolled in front of the tomb, they know about the Roman seal and the guard. And they don't really know how they are going to get inside the tomb. They stand at a borderland between Good Friday and what they do not yet know.

Then the earth shakes. If you've been in an earthquake before you know how unsettling it is to have the earth move beneath your feet. And yet this is more, for the cosmos is convulsing with the power of resurrection. All the powers of death, all the forces of selfishness and pride are losing their grip on the world. The creation itself is being put back on its intended and original foundation, one where self-giving love proves itself stronger than selfishness. No wonder the soldiers fall over in a faint. The Roman legions were good at imposing order. They were in charge because they were stronger than anyone else. Pride and fear had placed them there. But their strength proves to be powerless as Jesus' bursts from the confines of the tomb. The border of the kingdom of Self has been breached by love and there is no rebuff possible.

Onto this scene the women stumble. They look in the tomb, the place of death, and find that Jesus is not there. They turn and run—run into a very alive Jesus. They stand at the gates of a different kingdom, the kingdom of Love. And he says, "Go, tell the disciples to go to Galilee and there they will see me."

Do you want to meet the risen Lord? Go to Galilee, the messy borderlands, where ego loses out to spirit. Where is Galilee?

On one hand Galilee is to be found in the "normal" life you live. It's the routines, the job, the family, the places you like to go, and that you have to go. If Easter Sunday is grand and glorious, there's nothing immediately special about your daily living, except that that is where the risen Jesus promises to meet you. Do not look to the amazing, the outrageous and the dramatic. The risen Lord appears in the daily living of those who seek Him. Sometimes it is the spectacular clouds of southwestern New Mexico at sunset. Sometimes it is merely the smile of your child or grandchild, sometimes it is in an unexpected moment with a loved one, or a stranger, where meaning and purpose are shared in Christ's name, and the souls of both are lifted up and their spirits renewed. These gifts come in the routines of daily living, and always at the expense of ego-driven control. Here the Risen Christ is known to us.

Galilee is also to be found in the in-between spaces in your life. Sometimes it is within you. You have conflicting desires in your heart, and each of them has something good but you can't do both. You have two emotions that tug at one another, and neither seems to have the upper hand. You have conflicting needs, and the only way not to suffer completely is to suffer some in both areas, which is not a real attractive place to be. Sometimes it is around you. You have conflicting opportunities and you can't decide because both have something you value in them. Members of your community have differing ideas about what the good life looks like; all promise the world, and none of them really deliver. Good people inflict cruelty and injustice on others for what seem to be good reasons. In these muddy, messy areas of life the Ego would like to gain control, to establish some predictability, some security, some semblance of order. But there are too many unanswered questions, too many pushes and pulls, too much mystery for order. When you acknowledge the humility of living in the borderlands you open your spirit. In these moments you are given a vision of a path that is not really a choice of one part over another, but something larger, deeper, more powerful and more alive, you find a way forward that is wise and compassionate, a way that lives into the abundant life Jesus promises us, something that transcends the conundrums of life.

It is in the messiness of our everyday, workaday living that the gifts of abundant life often surprise us. They come as heralds of the truth of this day:

Alleluia, Jesus Christ is Risen: He is risen indeed, Alleluia.