

2-27-22 Community of Hope
Larry Henning

I know we're talking ancient history, but I wonder if anybody here remembers 8-millimeter home movies? ... You know ... short, choppy, and usually over-exposed. Well, some years ago, my folks—God rest their souls—did a very nice thing for me: they took a lot of home movies from my growing up and had them transferred to video. And these home movies always followed a yearly cycle of events: summer at the beach, my birthday in September, Christmas, my two brothers' birthday in January and, then, Easter. ... And the Easter movies were always this: the three Henning brothers all dressed up in matching outfits—so adorable—coming out of our front door on our way to church. On our way **to** church—never **after** church ... and why? Because, of course, by the end of church it was way too late. We were too busy doing the work of being kids to keep our clothes bright and clean and out of the mud. My parents had a hard-enough time keeping us neat and clean for thirty minutes before church on Easter morning: “Don't get those new suits dirty! Stay out of the mud!”

You know, I get the feeling that Peter was trying to do the same thing with Jesus that my folks tried to do with us—to keep him neat and clean and out of the dirt. Luke writes: [*Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. 30Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him*]. And Peter's response? [*Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”*]. “We'll make three dwellings and then we can stay here forever. Just look at you, Jesus—you and Moses and Elijah—look at your outfit: so dazzling; so spiffy! Stay up here! Stay clean; stay out of the mud; stay out of the blood; stay out of the sweat; stay out of the tears!”

But Peter could no more keep Jesus from getting dirty than my folks could with the Henning brothers. Jesus was way too busy leading his revolution of radical love and that meant sharing all the dirt, all the blood, all the sweat, and all the tears that came from living with and for his beloved.

You see, as spiffy as Jesus looked on top of that mountain, he was not really dressed in his Easter outfit ...not quite yet. The fact is, he was dressed in his work clothes—spiffed up maybe—but his work clothes and back to work he had to go—back to work in the valley ... and back to work he called his disciples, including our old friend Peter [*37: On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him.*] ... back to work indeed.

Yes, there was much work to do before Easter. And his work clothes would get very dirty indeed: Tear stained—Lazarus ... sweat in the Garden of Gethsemane [*Chapter 22: Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.*] ... and on his lynching cross, there was blood shed in radical solidarity with all God's beloved. ... Yes, blood, sweat and tears aplenty. So, maybe his outfit looked pretty spiffy on top of Transfiguration Mountain, but his work clothes were pretty stained by the end of Good Friday.

But, of course, all that was before Easter. How about after Easter? You know, when Jesus is all dressed up in **his** Easter outfit. So, then is he afraid to get dirty as the glorious, dazzling, Risen Christ? ... Sometimes you might think so by the way we Christians have treated him over the

centuries. ... Take Holy Communion for one example. ... I believe that somehow, someway beyond our understanding that Jesus the Christ is really present in the Holy Meal—in, with, and under bread and wine—as we Lutherans say. Because I believe Jesus loves us too much to say removed in some heavenly hideaway. Out his passionate love for us, Jesus comes in a way we can feel, taste and touch—a divine hug, if you will, because sometimes words aren't enough. So ...given his presence, it's good that we can give the meal the reverence and awe it deserves. ... But ... what if some bread falls on the floor ... or some wine or juice gets spilled? Should we be terrified to get the glorified, dazzling, resurrected Jesus a little dirty? ... Well – to answer that, let me tell you just a few places where the Risen Jesus in the Spirit's power has been this past week: **Ukraine.** For 2,000 years, the Risen Jesus in the power of the Spirit has worked as hard as he can—given the constraints of free will and the human lust for power—worked as best he can to move hearts toward peace and justice. And he will keep on working for however many years it takes for God's vision of peace, justice and wholeness (shalom) to be fully realized. ... The Risen Jesus has also worked as hard as he can to empower his followers to strive for peace and justice as well. ... But when humans have nonetheless chosen the path of war, God in Christ has been present in, with and under his beloved in their deep valley, fully present in the Spirit's power. And, so, in Ukraine our risen and still-wounded Messiah bears every bullet, every bomb, every rocket, every death, every grief, every anguished cry. He bears and will bear every wound of this conflict in his wounds. So, yes, even in his Easter best the Risen, but still Wounded Jesus will get muddy, and sweaty, and tear-stained, and even bloody ... because he will not abandon God's beloved in their hour of need.

Madagascar. Madagascar, the big island off of the southeast coast of Africa has been ravaged by cyclones on one hand and drought on the other: cyclones and drought exacerbated by climate change—millions now face starvation. Here's the cruel irony: Madagascar has contributed next to nothing to climate change, but is paying the heaviest consequences for others' willful negligence of God's holy creation. ... And the Risen and Wounded Jesus is there—in the Spirit—among his and therefore our sacred siblings—bearing their struggle and renewing their strength. Probably getting his Easter outfit pretty dusty from the drought, pretty muddy from the cyclones, pretty sweaty from the struggle to survive, pretty tear-stained from the anguish. ... At the same time, he is trying with all he's got to open the eyes of all his disciples to the struggles of God's people and of God's beautiful but threatened creation.

Brunswick, GA. The Risen and Wounded Jesus was there during and after the trial of three men tried and convicted with hate crimes against Ahmaud Arbery. There sharing Ahmaud's family's anguish and their yearning for justice. ...But also there—for the long haul—to find some way to work in the poisoned hearts of those three men—for they too are his siblings.

Yes, the Risen and Wounded Jesus has been hard at work in these challenging days ... apparently not a bit afraid of getting his spiffy Easter outfit stained with the blood, sweat and tears from his continual embrace of God's beloved.

So, those are just three of the many huge events going on in our wounded world and how could I preach the Gospel without addressing them—for that would be no gospel at all. ... But, I also have to tell you this: As busy as Jesus is these days, he is not too busy and will never be too busy for you and even for me. For we too are his beloved; yes, we are, my sacred siblings, yes, we are his beloved. So, he is not too busy, never too busy to be present in our lives—even if our challenges don't make the front-page news.

Not too busy to embrace us and strengthen us during our pandemic languishing. Not too busy to embrace us and lift our load from whatever weighs us down. Not too busy to work through the

hands and hearts of sacred siblings to bear one another's burdens. Not too busy to call and encourage us to be bold workers for his revolution of love. Not too busy to challenge us to be the most faithful disciples we can be where we live, where we work, where we learn, vote, play ... as well as where we pray. ... And ... not too busy to share our joys and even our laughter (And I'm thinking the Risen Jesus could use a good laugh or two these days, don't you think?)

And, my fellow MCC siblings, the Risen Jesus is not too busy, not too busy at all, to come to us in the Spirit's power in this time of transition in our communal life; not too busy to share and bear our grief (could that be a few tear stains on his Easter outfit from Sonja's leaving?). Not too busy to come in the power of the Spirit to guide our holy deliberations—even if they produce a little sweat; not too busy to open our hearts to each other and to God's vision for the road ahead for this holy, precious community of faith.

You know, my parents could not keep the Henning boys from getting dirty, even in our Easter best. You know why? Because kids will be kids.

And there is no keeping Jesus from getting dirty even in his spiffy Easter best. You know why? ... Because Jesus will be Jesus. Thanks be to God. AMEN.