

## ***The Tag Sale***

**An Eastertide Pep Talk**

**Text: Psalm 150; Luke 24: 28-35**

**Rev. Dr. C. Geordie Campbell**

**April 3, 2016**

**Whatever else may have happened . . .** at first light on Easter day this much we know for sure: the lives of the disciples were irreversibly changed. Something incredibly profound and powerful was set loose that simply could not be retracted or contained, nowhere near it.

They were quickened, overcome, apprehended, by a force they did not understand. That's what the heart of Easter does and Easter does to the heart. All of a sudden it became undeniably, indescribably, palpably clear that God is real and not an apparition, not an abstraction of wishful thinking, not a construct of human ingenuity, not a list of codified behavior – but a living, breathing, present, abundant reality. Alive!

“Did not our hearts burn within us?” they asked one another. It was their nascent moment of recognition, an infant experience of a’ha, a seismic awakening, the unexpected discovery of something entirely new. In an instant everything became larger. The walls were blown away. And nothing could possibly go back to what was before because the Living Spirit of Jesus was alive and at large.

**That was the explosive epicenter of Easter . . .** the Christo-genesis of the faith that later took the name of the One at the center. He was called Jesus of Nazareth before Easter only later to be experienced as the Risen Christ, the very beating heart of Christian faith. Did not our hearts burn?

But of course human beings have an amazing capacity to complicate things. (Did you know that?) And so as the years followed, both by intention and not, incredibly complex constructs conspired to form what is now our Christian history. Explanations and thoughts bundled and tangled, to structured and codified, layered and to institutionalized. Creeds developed, each of them expanding on the nascent six words of Easter faith: “Jesus is alive! Jesus is Lord!”<sup>1</sup> Multiple experiences in oral culture were told as stories and narratives added to the mix.

And more: the Roman Empire saw Christianity as a useful construct by which to govern and control. More years and more time and schisms erupted between east and west, and later between variant expressions of interpretation about what and who and how. Powers and principalities, theologies (some of them very excellent) and ecclesiology's (some of them very beautiful); egos and empires and wealth, certitude and ambiguities grew, such that today, by authority of Google (which, for some, is darn near biblical) we can now claim some 33,000 Christian denominations!

**I'll call that brief rant . . .** “Geordie’s Oversimplified History of the Christian Church!” And we still live with all of the accretion and sediment, shadows and light, layers and ideas, some good and some not. But most important, we also still live with the question at the core from the first day: “Did not our hearts burn within us?”

Before her recent passing Phyllis Tickle<sup>2</sup> was one of the very creative minds of our own time. She helped us to understand that every now and again the church, such as it is, needs to throw a tag sale. It needs to clean out the attic and the basement and open the windows for fresh air. It needs to examine and discern and reassess. And the practices and thoughts, structures and assumptions that have formed over time need to be asked the tag sale question: "Is this helpful to us anymore?"

She traces our history with comprehensive detail and notes that this has happened roughly every 500 years. Every 500 years to ask the question: "Did not our hearts burn within us?" Every 500 years to regroup and regain, so to speak, and to focus afresh on the very heart of the larger world that Easter made so vividly real 2000 some years ago and still does today.

**And so that's something of where we are . . .** in the midst of our own time. We are living through virtual reformation as increasingly large circles of conversation – where within First Church, across the landscape, and in fact around the world, people are asking that 500-year question.

Will Campbell once said: "All institutions are fundamentally inimical to what Christ was about on this earth." "So the challenge is to imaginatively find ourselves within the larger story of what God is doing, and be alive and brave enough to join in." "And to do so without being robbed of hope, or mistaking institutional forms and formats for the whole truth, or conceding to despair."<sup>3</sup>

That is spot-on! So how about it? What do you say? It is our Eastertide to energize and awaken and startle each of us and also First Church . . . a time for the transforming power of God to lift and empower and encourage us to new ways . . . and, in Paul's words, to dare the renewal of our minds.<sup>4</sup>

And, most of all, most important and never to loose, to feel the burning heart within us as the Gospel calls. We can do this! We are doing this! In the Living Spirit of Jesus as God creates yet again, a new future. Amen.

© 2016 Charles Geordie Campbell

First Church  
12 South Main Street  
West Hartford, CT 06107

---

<sup>1</sup> Marcus Borg and N.T. Wright. The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions. Harper, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Phyllis Tickle. The Great Emergence. Baker Books, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> All three quotes from Congregations, The Alban Institute, Winter 2008, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Carol Howard Merritt, "The Church's New Foundation" in Christian Century, November 12, 2014, p. 45.