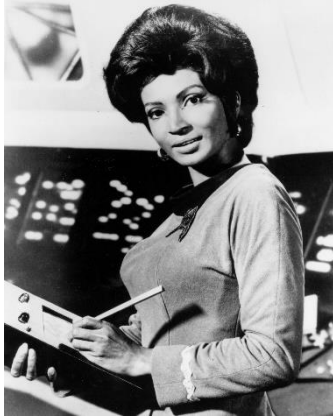


Do we want the WHOLE Jesus?

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

April 16, 2023

by Rev. Dave Le Grand



Nichelle Nichols, better known as the original Lieutenant Uhura in Star Trek, was once introduced to someone claiming to be "her biggest fan" – Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Nichols had resigned from her ground-breaking role on Star Trek days before they met at an awards ceremony. But when she informed King she planned to leave the show, she told the Television Academy Foundation, King was adamant that she could not abandon the iconic role.

"He said: 'For the first time on television we will be seen as we should be seen every day, as intelligent, quality, beautiful people... who can go into space,'" Nichols recalled.

"I just stood there realising every word he was saying was the truth. At that moment, the world tilted for me." She would continue in the role for years.¹

I've been thinking, this past week, a great deal about Thomas, the trauma he had been through, not being ready to believe, yet, that what he saw, Jesus dead on a cross, was not the end to hope. Grief can do that, can't it. Sometimes in times of grief, just getting up in the morning can be a monumental task.

Were his friends joking around with him, saying Jesus was alive? It must have felt surreal, that moment of realization, that Jesus was indeed alive. So many questions. Confusion.

I consider again that encounter between the Nichols, the iconic actress playing Uhura in Star Trek, stunned to find out that the great Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a Trekkie and particularly considered her role to be important in the civil rights movement.

She had other plans to move into Broadway, but this man, who from a distance was such an inspiration, was now, up close and personal, placing a burden on her.

A relationship with Jesus is kind of like that, maybe. From a distance, and we have a lot of distance, 2,000 years, he can seem pretty one-dimensional. Great stories. His miracles are memorable – he can become more like a character in a book. But to let his teachings, his stories, his life, model and craft the way I live my life – that requires allowing these stories after Easter, the stories of Jesus encountering his followers, deflated, grieving, and telling him that he is alive – allowing these after-Easter stories to penetrate my soul.

Like a long sleepless night punctuated by a beautiful sunrise. I want to sleep, but wow, that sunrise is spectacular. Or, like a well-worn life that one has lived, normal, calm, is interrupted by an inexplicable desire to change directions.

¹ "Martin Luther King: Surprising facts about civil rights icon." www.bbc.com January 16, 2023

A person from my old high school became a successful lawyer, but one day he chose to be a carpenter. He became a cook also. It was something borne from deep inside of him.

I wonder if each of us has something like that planted inside us. We can live a normal life. All is good. But deep inside of some of us is an awareness that there is something more. Something that needs to be realized. But it is going to be inconvenient. A change of careers. A relationship that is unfulfilling and needs to end. A call from deep inside of you to speak a truth that you are tempted to suppress. What will people say?

At the heart of this story, and every story of this Easter Season, these Sundays between Easter and Pentecost, is Jesus challenging people in the depth of their grief and pain; his appearance disputes their sense of normal that death is death, and hope is gone – Jesus calls them, and us, to accept on faith, in spite of evidence, maybe death is not the end. Maybe change is possible. Are you and I open to radical change today if God is calling it of us? Are we open to considering that call that God might make of us, even if it requires a significant change in us, or our lifestyle?

Sure, you might say, you've already had big changes before. Every day, are you and I prepared to be invited by God, Christ, to accept a new mission, to boldly go where no one has gone before?

As we move towards Earth Day, next Saturday April 23, I happened across an interesting piece of Eco Theology² related to Thomas – the question asker. It proposes:

That, just as Jesus invited Thomas to touch his wounds and believe in new life, the risen Christ comes to us as we, daily, touch the wounds of our planet in order to bring wholeness, healing, and hope.

This week, we are invited to think about that. The wounds of Creation – the storms and weather, evidence is overwhelming that it is getting more extreme. Contaminated water systems. Paving over essential farmlands to accommodate human convenience. What *environmental pain* do you connect with, that causes you to experience grief? During this week leading into Earth Day, what are ways that we can support the people on the front lines of “touching the wounds” of our planet? One way. Just one. One baby step, and maybe it will call us closer encountering. Not just a one-dimensional Jesus, but experiencing the **whole** Christ. Amen.

² “Touching the Wounds of Our Planet: Thomas and Our Eco-Spiritual Crisis.” April 9, 2023 BY LEAH D. SCHADE. <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/ecopreacher/2023/04/touching-the-wounds-of-our-planet-thomas-and-our-eco-spiritual-crisis/>