

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, April 15, 2018
The Rev. Dr. David Thompson
Can we talk with the dead?

Jewish tradition:

By this time Samuel was dead...Saul came to a woman by night and said: Consult the dead and call up the man I name to you...The woman asked who she should call up and Saul answered 'Samuel.'...the King said to her 'what do you see?' The woman said 'I see a ghostly form coming up from the earth, like an old man coming wrapped in a cloak. Then Saul knew it was Samuel and Samuel said, 'why have you disturbed me and brought me up?'

Christian tradition:

"Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them and they were talking with Jesus"

Muslim tradition

"The meeting of those who are alive with those who are in the intermediate realm takes place due to either one of them wishing it, and as Allah's favor upon their asking."

Here the good news of Easter as the women did over 2,000 years ago: **He is Risen!**

Two buddies, Bob and Earl, were two of the biggest baseball fans in America. Their entire adult lives, Bob and Earl discussed baseball history in the winter, and they poured over every box score during the season. They went to sixty games a year. They even agreed that whoever died first would try to come back and tell the other if there was baseball in heaven.

One summer night, Bob passed away in his sleep after watching a Yankee victory earlier in the evening. A few nights later, his buddy, Earl, awoke to the sound of Bob's voice from beyond. "Bob is that you?" Earl asked. "Of course, it is me," Bob replied. "This is unbelievable!" Earl exclaimed. "So, tell me, is there baseball in heaven?" "Well, I have some good news and some bad news for you. Which do you want to hear first?" "Tell me the good news first." "Well, the good news is that, yes Earl, there is baseball in heaven." "Oh, that is wonderful! So, what could possibly be the bad news?" "Tomorrow night you are pitching!"

It was August the 16th 1977. I was at the Goethe institute in Toronto taking a crash course in German. It was an intensive no-nonsense kind of course and difficult. The teacher was a taskmaster, German and proficient. But on that day after the morning break he announced that Elvis Presley had died. He appeared to be visibly shaken and upset saying how much Elvis had meant to him. Elvis Presley touched the lives of millions. Dr Raymond Moody, the medical doctor famous for Life after Life research wrote a book on Elvis titled Elvis after life: Unusual psychic experiences surrounding the death of a Superstar.

There was one young woman who had dated Elvis and they had talked about death together. They had wanted to know whether they would live after they died. Once on a date when it

was raining Elvis had impulsively given her his jacket. After he died this jacket started to act up, often falling to the floor from the closet when she was hanging it up, once when she was looking straight at it. A couple of months later she saw one sleeve move up and down slowly by itself every now and then for about ten minutes. Finally, she had a dream that she felt explained what Elvis had been trying to tell her. 'Remember how we used to talk about death?' he asked in the dream. 'We wanted to know whether we would live after we die. I've been trying to get through to you through the jacket. I want to let you know that we do live after we die.'

I had a friend in Stratford Ontario Canada called Lew. He was the former President of the Kist soft drink plant in Stratford. I found him on other subjects to be a credible witness not given to fantasy or crazy stories. One day he came into my office and told me this story. He had locked up the house as usual. It was a cold and bitter night and had then gone to bed. About 11 o'clock he heard a voice calling him. He awoke with the sound and the voice said "Lew! Lew! It's Dad! I was just passing through and thought I would say hello." Lew jumped out of bed all excited and said, "I'll be right down Dad!" and put his dressing gown on and went downstairs. When he got there, there was no one there but the front door was wide open, and the cold was pouring in. Lew went outside to check things out for some time. But there was no one there. Unnerved he was starting to go back to bed when the phone rang. It was a call from a Toronto hospital. The caller asked Lew to sit down for he had some news for him. Lew obediently sat down, and the caller said, "I am so sorry to inform you, but your father has just passed away." I knew Lew well. He was articulate, rational and believable. I said to him "Your Dad just wanted you to know that he was alright." Lew just nodded and smiled.

Alistair was a member of my congregation in Stratford. One day he called me to say that his son had been killed in a car accident and would I go to the Hospital with him to identify the body. We went into the morgue together. They pulled the sheet pulled back and I saw the father look at his son's body. The shock on the father's face was palpable and with great difficulty I heard him say "It's him!" Alistair was absolutely shattered, for the son, had been the light of his life. The family stopped coming to church. They couldn't handle why it had happened and they questioned God. They clung closer together as a couple. Depression settled into their countenances. They carried on as best as they could. I felt incredibly sorry for them and comforted them as best I could. But their faith was shattered. Christmas came, and they were not looking forward to it. Alistair JNR always came home on Christmas Eve after work to celebrate Christmas with his parents. That Christmas Eve Alistair senior locked up the house and garage as usual. He was very sure about that. It was bitterly cold that night. Alistair senior went to bed and after midnight he awoke. The house was now very cold. The furnace was running full blast. What ever was going on thought Alistair? Alistair JNR always came in through the garage door on Christmas Eve. That door was now wide open, the cold pouring in. So was the inner door to the house. Nothing had been touched. Alistair senior knew he had locked it up tight as usual. So, he looked around. He went outside. There was no one there. The next Sunday Alistair and Moira were back in church and they told me the story of Alistair's return on Christmas Eve. "David, he said, "He told me the only way he could that he was all right". The joy returned to the couple's faces, their depression lifted. Their loved

son was all right. And I prayed with them and gave thanks to God. Nothing I could say made any difference. They needed a touch from beyond.

It seems to me that the major message from the other world is this; our loved one is alright and safe. We don't need to worry. Underneath our lives are the Everlasting arms.

It might interest you to know that the research into this field is vast. Probably the most comprehensive effort was undertaken by Bill and Judy Guggenheim who interviewed 2,000 informants from 50 States and 10 Canadian provinces. They coined the phrase after death communication or what is now known as the ADC Experience. They sifted through stories in some 3,300 accounts of ADCs. They sorted them into categories like: hearing a voice, feeling a touch, more than a dream and symbolic ADCs. Sometimes the dreams gave details as to where valuables left by a loved one could be found. I recently lost a friend whose wife went to a psychic to see if she could get in touch. Her husband came through and informed her that there was a leak in the furnace in the basement that she needed to address. Sure enough, when she got home she found the leak right where he said it would be.

There are amazing stories out there, one by a woman called Claire Sylvia, who has written a book about it. After a heart and lung transplant operation, dancer Claire Sylvia discovered that new organs were not the only thing she inherited. Never having liked such foods as beer and chicken nuggets, she suddenly started craving them. After an extraordinary dream in which she learned his name, she sought out the family of her donor -- a teenage boy who died in a motorcycle accident. Guess who loved beer and chicken nuggets? --She learned that it is indeed possible for two souls to merge in one body. After all she did have his heart... and the heart is so much more than a pump. It is a very sophisticated computer. Deepack Chopra on hearing this story said: "This is a story that must be told and heard...a fascinating example of how cellular memory can outlive physical death".

In the religious traditions stories that recount talking with the dead abound. Jesus apparently consulted with Moses and Elijah before his crucifixion. The disciples are witnesses to this encounter and don't quite know what to make of it.

The Jewish story of Saul and Samuel is fascinating and sounds very like some stories we can read about today with the use of a medium to contact the dead. Saul banned the mediums in his territory but when in distress he decided to try and contact Samuel, Saul sought a medium out. He disguised himself so that she wouldn't know who he was. When Samuel is called up she immediately recognized that this is Saul who wants to see Samuel and she becomes mortally afraid for her life. Saul promised not to harm her, and the séance continued. Saul did not hear what he wanted to hear from Samuel at all. In fact, the news distressed him to his core. Samuel was fully aware of this reality from where he was. In fact, he knew that Saul and his son Jonathan would be joining him the next day. Dr. Raymond Moody says that this sort of story is common. The dead are aware of us in our world. They know stuff! Their reality also takes in ours.

In our modern world what credence can we give to such stories?

This subject cannot be easily verified by the use of the scientific method. Because they are not repeatable. But historical tools of verification for accuracy **can** be used but, in the end, we are left with faith and stunningly amazing anecdotes. We can say whether the anecdote sounds authentic. We can also experience such events ourselves. For me they have come in dreams, or from a psychic or in remarkable coincidences. **But in my experience these happenings cannot be commanded.** If they are authentic they seem to come unbidden and sometimes at moments of great need. They are not letters from Heaven. They are more like little postcards.

In fact, there is a great little book I suggest that you read called Postcards from heaven. It is well reviewed by Caroline Myss, the medical doctor Larry Dossey and Dr. Bernie Siegal author of Love Medicine and miracles. It is written by Californian Dan Gordon a Jewish screenwriter and filmmaker. He writes: “Nearly all of us have had or have heard of an experience in which a soul departed reaches back to those of us who have been left behind...Sometimes, it’s no more than a whisper, a familiar smell in the air, or just the feeling of a presence as vivid as when the loved one was still alive. These moments are just that...moments, a glimpse behind the veil; not a letter from heaven, but a post card.”

Dan Gordon had lost his brother and father before he had lost his son Zaki. Zaki died in a car wreck tragically. Dan was utterly devastated. In life his son Zaki had remarkable old soul eyes which, when they fastened upon you, looked deep into your soul. He was this way from birth and this was characteristic of him throughout his short life. After his son Zaki died his father had this experience. It was the Tuesday after they buried Zaki that Dan saw the wild rabbit. It was in the backyard just sitting there beyond the screen door. He was a jack rabbit and Dan Gordon testifies that they are extremely shy and skittery as a species. Not this one. In fact, this rabbit, with old soul eyes looked like the Dalai Lama, writes Gordon. Placid. Calm. Tranquil. Enlightened. At peace. He opened the screen door and asked, “Who are you?” He expected the rabbit to run. The rabbit just sat there with his Dalai Lama look. Gordon offered it some carrots. The rabbit just looked. It didn’t eat, and it didn’t run. Dan cut the carrots up. The rabbit did not even sniff them. He just sat there. Dan Gordon went back into the house. The rabbit stayed there. Then Adam came home. The rabbit stayed there. Adam checked out the rabbit. The rabbit stayed there. Gordon asked Adam whether he would like to throw the football around. They went outside to do that, and the rabbit followed them. They went to the park to have more room to throw the ball. The rabbit followed them. They ran, they jumped, they shouted. Still the rabbit stayed with them. When they walked back up to the house the rabbit walked with them. Dan Gordon walked into the house and Adam went to his bedroom and still the rabbit sat there. So, Dan went out again and said to the rabbit. “Did Zaki or Papa send you here?” The rabbit twitched its nose. “Whoever sent you,” Dan said, “please tell them thank-you and that I got the message. **Zaki is okay I think. Right?**” The jackrabbit twitched his nose. “Thanks” Dan said. “You can go now.” The jackrabbit immediately turned and left, and Dan never saw it again.

But with this postcard from heaven Dan Gordon ***felt the kind of relief that only a parent knows when he knows that his child has arrived safely home. That he was all right. That was what Alistair felt.***

What is the 'take-away' for me?

Pay attention. Stay open. Don't look for reasoned treatises as to what comes next. Put your faith in the goodness of God and instead look for postcards from Heaven that assure you that your loved one has arrived safely HOME! They are alive!

It is after all what Easter is all about...He is Risen!

He is risen indeed!