

Resurrection: Living in the Vision

1 Corinthians 15: 42-58

Today is Easter, the central focus of the Christian faith. We celebrate the resurrection. Jesus who died now lives. This is my sixth Easter as your pastor. For the past five years, I've stood before many of you to articulate my understanding of Jesus' resurrection, to share with you my faith in that resurrection.

Today, we have celebrated a service of Christian baptism. In preparing for this service, I talked with the candidates about the meaning of baptism as a symbol of resurrection. One of those being baptized actually went out and downloaded my last four Easter Sunday sermons and read them!

That action prompted me to go back and see what I had said myself! With all the theological exploration we've done here at Crossroads during the past four years, I found it helpful and reassuring to hear a fairly consistent interpretation of this idea of resurrection.

Jesus' resurrection is an event that can't be fully or adequately described from our perspective of space and time. What do you believe about the resurrection? Do you just not know? That's okay because what we believe about it is strictly a matter of biblical interpretation. Each of us gets to choose how we interpret and what we believe. Each interpretation is probably just as right and just as wrong, and each is certainly incomplete.

We know this about Jesus' resurrection: before Easter, Jesus was richly steeped in the Spirit and its presence, but he could only be known and experienced by a few people. He was limited in time and space. "Jesus as the risen Christ can be experienced anywhere and everywhere." (Borg)

The power of Jesus' resurrection is not found in the empty tomb or in the testimonies of resurrection appearances. It is first and finally to be found in our experience of the living Christ. The challenges and dangers of life do not disappear, but because of Easter, they become bearable. It has been said that resurrection was God's gift to Jesus who lived his humanity fully without giving in to the fears of death and suffering. God did not rescue him from death, but saved him through death. God likewise saves us not from death and its many forms – fear, hatred, hopelessness, meaninglessness, and death of physical body -- but from power of death to defeat us.

Death holds no ultimate power over us now. Death no longer defines us. To embrace resurrection is to embrace life fully – our deepest wants and truest passions that lead us toward what is most real and meaningful for us and for all people. When we keep life at arms length, arguing or sorting out events of the past, we insulate ourselves against the Spirit's power to transform our lives. We virtually guarantee that we will never know the abundance Jesus taught and that he himself found. But resurrection means the possibilities for our lives can be re-opened like the story of Jesus was re-opened that first Easter morning. The living Christ invites us to re-open the possibilities of our own story.

There it is -- resurrection! I've had five years to explain resurrection and to articulate how I understand it to this congregation. Frankly, I don't think there's more to add to what I've already said. Anyone who has listened today, or who cares to visit the Crossroads web site and archives, can read my very best efforts explain resurrection.

At this point, I am convinced that resurrection is not an event for us to see, but the lens through which to see everything else. So, what better than a story to illustrate? Beyers Naudé was a minister in the white South African Dutch Reformed Church during the time of apartheid – that state-sponsored form of racial segregation that had horrible consequences for South Africans

of color. Beyers Naudé was a highly successful minister, a rising star in the South African Church, but then he came face to face with a painful truth. He realized the implications of apartheid and made a 180° turnaround.

He spoke out against apartheid and began to side with black and mixed race South Africans. He began to challenge his church and faced being totally “ostracized, pushed out, and left in the cold.” He became a living example of the power of resurrection in one person’s life. He became what life can be seen through the lens of resurrection -- not only as an ideal, but life in its difficult and daily reality. Beyers Naudé helps us understand with his life and challenges us with his words:

We must open our hearts and our minds and our whole beings to others’ needs and absorb and allow the Spirit of God to interpret to us what is happening and what should be our message and our response. [When we] open ourselves to those who suffer and therefore enable them to assist us, there is growth. But if you’re not prepared to do that—out of fear that it may cost too much, the sacrifice may be too great, and the dangers could be very, very serious—then that process of growth is stalled. It does not go any farther.

The question of material security plays a very important role because you can feel that there is so much at stake from the viewpoint of material privilege and security. You find it becomes much more difficult to even risk the possible loss of these things. But if you know there is very little to lose, because whatever you have you have committed to God, then you can say, “Well, it’s not mine. I share this with whomever may wish to have this. Then there is an inner freedom that comes about as a result. There is also, therefore, a liberty that you experience of being available to people in their need. That’s a tremendously enriching experience.”

If we believe that we are dealing with a God of justice and love, a God who wants to see the Kingdom become a glorious reality, then we know that whatever we are doing through God’s grace is part of that process of renewal. Let us be building together so that we may truly make this world God’s Kingdom.

In this one life, we see the face of resurrection – a life lived in the present reality of God’s kingdom, God’s new age. Will we see our own faces there, as well, challenging the kingdoms of this world despite fear? When we are living, working, and standing for justice and Shalom, Jesus stands with us, stands in us, and goes before us. He proclaims our own resurrection in the new life of the new creation of God

We sang “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today” not because a man was brought back from death to continue his physical life. Jesus’ resurrection was not an event of time and space. It was an event of eternity. It was a liminal event, a crossing of the threshold from temporal to eternal. As a result, the new age of God is present now in the middle of a broken and bleeding world.

We proclaim God’s new age, while living in this present age, when we worship. We proclaim it when we act with justice -- building bridges of relationship -- when we embrace peace and break down barriers of hate, prejudice, and fear.

We proclaim God’s new age in our spiritual relationships by our commitment to family, to

partnerships, and to community in the bond of love. We proclaim it when we choose to live like Beyers Naudé in the difficult, painful, and ultimately life-giving choices that challenge our society's, and even our church's, destructive ways.

When we begin to bring God's future into our lives, then resurrection becomes a present reality. Only then will we find justice flowing baptismal waters and peace growing like flowers from bulbs planted in rich soil. Only then will we find spiritual life emerging within us, between us, stretching out to embrace the world, blessing our children and all children forever. This is the vision, God's yearning, for all of us to see and follow – to bring Easter life in this world.