

What Resurrection Looks Like
John 20:1-18
Preached by Rev Dr. Harry Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
Easter Sunday, April 12, 2009

Let's begin with a story. The parents of a young soldier serving in Iraq got word their son would be coming home the following Sunday so e-mails and telephone calls to relatives and friends spread the news there would be a surprise party to welcome their boy home the moment he walked through the door. Both Mom and Dad were taking that Friday off from work to get the house ready when they saw two army officers coming up the front steps bringing the news their son was killed in action several days earlier.

Immediately both parents felt like they were broadsided by a Mac truck. Their joy, instantly dissipated, was replaced by a dark, heavy cloud of despair. Moments of uncontrollable sobbing would quickly give way to periods of cold numbness and then swing back again. In an almost robotic trance they contacted their guests with the horrible news but insisted everybody still come on Sunday because neither parent wanted to be left alone.

And so three days later the house was filled with mourners when suddenly there was a loud knock on the door followed by even louder shouts of "Open up! Don't keep me standing out here!" The guests, perplexed and angry said to each other, "Who could be so rude and insensitive at a time like this?" Once more the same voice bellowed, "Hey, open up! Isn't anybody home?" The mother and father looked at each other wondering, "Could it be?" They ran to open the door and sure enough, it was him, standing there looking tired, but with a big smile on his face. Their son, who was dead, was alive!

As far as I know, this story never really happened, but then again, maybe it did. Sometimes communications break down and families get bad news, only to find out it was all a terrible mistake. So maybe this story did happen. Sometimes we do wake up and realize our worst nightmare was just that, a nightmare.

I'm sure Mary Magdalene and the disciples felt pretty much the same way as our young soldier's family when they finally realized Jesus, who really was dead, was now alive. The oppressive doom and gloom of Good Friday was instantly swept away by a deep sense of relief and a deeper sense of joy. Their friend and Master, certifiably dead and buried was miraculously raised up to new life. But for the disciples the resurrection became much more than just getting Jesus back as they slowly realized all the tremendous implications of the empty tomb. Suddenly, everything changed. Everything they were taught as children, all their perceptions and world views were turned on their heads.

Five hundred years ago Nicolaus Copernicus published his theory of heliocentrism stating the earth is not the center of the universe. Up to that point it was believed the sun, stars and moon revolved around the earth, not the other way around. Since his book came out the day of his death, you can assume Copernicus delayed its publication because he foresaw the horrendous controversy his theory would cause. The Copernican Revolution turned the world on its head. Everything people were taught since childhood became obsolete and had to be unlearned. The world would never again be the same.

Certainly Easter changed everything. The moment Jesus stepped out of the tomb sin and death could no longer laugh last because by being raised from the dead, the new last word, "He is risen," liberated us from our darkest tyrannies. Christ's resurrection reaffirmed Jesus' promise, "I am the resurrection and the life, if you believe in me, even though you die yet will you live and everyone who believes in me will never die."

Since Easter is all about resurrection, I have a question for you. In your mind, what does resurrection really look like? Certainly for the disciples, resurrection meant Jesus was back again, they saw, heard and touched him whenever he slipped into their time and space. But as I said earlier, the longer Jesus was with them the more they had to reconsider the tremendous implications of his resurrection.

The obvious implication of resurrection is freedom from oppression. This morning we began worship in a symbolic and innovative way. You entered the sanctuary hearing a dreary funeral dirge and seeing black bunting draped over the chancel. The atmosphere was terminally oppressive until suddenly you heard various voices shouting the good news, "He's alive, He is risen, He is risen indeed!" followed by the black bunting falling from the chancel revealing bright and colorful spring flowers and banners proclaiming Christ's victory over sin and death.

Freedom from oppression is the obvious implication of resurrection. You no longer need to creep and crawl like a caterpillar, now you can spread your wings and fly like a butterfly. Sounds nice, but the question remains unanswered. "What does resurrection really look like?" How and when does the power of the resurrection raise you up? What does resurrection really look like?

Maybe resurrection looks like this: You'll sense you're being raised up to new life when suddenly your preconceived notions about your relationships with God, your neighbor and yourself are suddenly turned on their head. Because Jesus is being raised up in you, without any effort on your part, you no longer feel the compulsion to manipulate people and situations. You stop being afraid if you give too much of yourself or your money to a neighbor in need or a good and worthy cause you'll have nothing left over for yourself. With Christ living in you, you're no longer content always playing it safe. You start letting Christ take risks through you; guaranteed outcomes are no longer one of your hard and fast requirements for your personal involvement, since you're not totally uncomfortable living with chaos, because you realize without periods of creative insecurity the human spirit atrophies and nothing significant ever gets done.

I think it's when you sense these things happening you begin to see what resurrection really looks like. Putting it simply, your attitudes, perceptions, habits and goals start changing because the Risen Christ is living in you and when you let him living through you.

But resurrection also looks like this: you find yourself experiencing a growing awareness of realities not of this world. In the old Presbyterian Book of Common Worship there's a prayer from the funeral service thanking God "that deep in the human heart is the unquenchable trust that life does not end with death and that you who made us will continue to care for us beyond the bounds of our vision even as you have already cared for us in this earthly world."

Unless you're an ardent atheist, everybody has a deepening sense there's more to life than what we experience in the natural world. This is borne out when you hear an increasing number of people who say, "I'm not religious, but I am spiritual." What they're communicating is an openness to the mystery of life, but they link any profession to a particular faith, especially Christianity, as being spiritually repressive and arrogant. Especially in the emerging multicultural and religious world claiming your Christ is God is out of step with the times.

But the resurrection is intrinsically linked to Christ and what he promised, "I am the resurrection and the life." In other words, Resurrection is Christ and Christ is resurrection, like love and marriage you can't have one without the other.

So what does resurrection look like? It looks like Jesus. Christ himself is resurrection, the personification of God's power and glory bringing grace and salvation to the world he so loved. The prelude of John's Gospel proclaims,

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God...All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." (John 1:1-3)

We read this passage on Christmas Eve, but we should remember it on Easter morning so we realize the world was both created and saved through Christ. That's the Good News we celebrate and are not ashamed to claim because it connects us to the truth that sets us free.

Our Christ is Christ and when we claim Christ is the resurrection and the life, the creator and savior of the world we should take our cue from Jesus himself and make our proclamations in the deepest spirit of humility and awe because after all, it's not all about what we believe, it's all about what Christ did for the world.

When Jesus stepped out of the tomb everything changed, the old was finished and gone everything became fresh and new. No longer are you and I the center or the universe, now Christ is the center and we revolve around the Son the sole agent of creation and salvation.

What Resurrection Looks Like
John 20:1-18

Once again hear Jesus' own words: *"I am the resurrection and the life. If you believe in me though you were dead, yet shall you live. If you believe in me, you shall not perish, but have eternal life. Do you believe this?"*