

Scriptures:

Acts 4:32-35

John 20:19-31

After Resurrection

I recall being slightly impressed and rather surprised with myself for earning the Top Student award in Seminary. It was a different award than Valedictorian it was the award for being the most “pastorally prepared.” As I have worked as a minister in these changing times however I have doubted I deserved that because being a pastor today is very different than it was even twenty years ago. Since becoming a minister I have discovered that the church is much more about structure, building and rules, than people and that is not exactly how I imagined it to be. It has recently been pointed out to me a couple times that I am what I would call much more “pastoral” in my preaching than many. I can’t deny that. I can get very theological when it is required but my whole faith life is about heart and that is where I preach from.

There is good reason for that. I can have all the theological training in the world but when the rubber hits the road. When I have been in the “dark night of the soul” it is not my position on the Trinity, Substitutionary atonement, Cosmology, Theism, Hamartiology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology or even Christology that has saved my soul. Rather, it has been the having a deep knowledge and belief that there is more than this broken world we see and therefore I am not alone in this journey of life. That has been my salvation.

One author wrote “Plunging into Kierkegaard, ... had my life challenged. His pointed, barbed critiques of a thin, superficial, even faked faith blew me away — including his report of walking around Copenhagen, asking people if they believed Jesus was raised from the dead. Almost unanimously, his fellow citizens said *Yeah, sure*. But what difference did it make? No one could answer; no one had much to show for their belief.”¹

People often ask me how was Easter? The response is always positive. This year I remembered why I usually take the week after Easter off. Easter is wonderful and exhausting. It is full of services but I find it exhausting because when I am writing sermons and preparing services I enter deeply into the story. A true story of betrayal, abandonment, loneliness, companionship, horror, grief, despair, love, hope, excitement and elation. This is a story when we follow it, engage it and believe it, it should change our lives. The scriptures for the Sunday following Easter are meant to astonish us with the difference resurrection makes. Acts 4:32-35 describes a how a vital church is formed. The miracles continue as the impact of Christ’s love and resurrection and changed their very lives. Every person gave up all their possessions to ensure

¹ <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/8912/weekly-preaching-april-8-2018>

no one went without and they were of one heart and soul? Imagine if the Easter story impacted our lives in such a way that we shared all of our positions with one another and because of one heart and soul.

Psalms 133 is obviously a fitting Easter text: *How lovely when brothers dwell together in unity*. Or we might say, *How rare*. Or *How miraculous*. *How resurrection-like*. There is an inextricable link between "No one said any of the things he possessed was his own but they had everything in common" and "And with great power they gave testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" and "There was not a needy person among them." We can talk church growth strategies all we'd like, but the early Christians expanded exponentially because their witness was what they did with their possessions. Their faith experience changed their lives in such a way they began to truly love their neighbours. We are so enmeshed, we prefer to keep our own stuff and blame others who don't have enough, or we feel noble if we toss some loose change or some leftover canned goods into a basket.

If we were to have read the text from 1 John 1:1-2:2 we would have heard testimony. The writer speaks urgently about what they had seen "with our own eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands... We saw it!" The Gospels are a compilation of eyewitness accounts. The earliest Christian preachers could say *We saw him, we touched him, if anybody could debunk the resurrection or his lordship, it would be us*. If they were not to share their story we likely would not be still telling it today. People want to know why you believe or why you follow a faith, not the you just got up and went to church today.

They shared so that they could have fellowship with each other and with God and so that their 'joy may be complete.' The message is not *You better be joyful*, but *We are joyful*. Joy isn't happiness taken up a notch or two. It's so very different. The point of Easter is forgiveness, not getting eternal life now. John 20:19-31. Just ask Thomas and Peter and Mary and the rest.

You know the story. The doors are locked, Jesus' followers are filled with grief and fear. They don't even seem to recognize Jesus (Mary Magdalene or the twelve!). Jean Vanier wrote "I think they are blinded by their unfulfilled expectations and their feelings of loss and despair." "To such people Jesus utters a word, with the power of the one who commanded stars, sky and earth to come into being. It's the word which stilled the storm: "Peace." As Jesus clarified earlier in John, this peace isn't the one the world gives! (John 14:27). Jesus doesn't give you some peace of mind or serenity you think you want. Jesus' Peace is his personal presence. In Jesus' presence there is no fear, though the way Jesus banishes fear might get us a bit agitated. Elie Wiesel famously said "If an angel ever says, 'Be not afraid,' you'd better watch out: a big assignment is on the way." Jesus comforts with one hand and then shoves them out into hard labor and danger with the other."²

² <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/8912/weekly-preaching-april-8-2018>

The fact that Jesus still has wounds in his hands and side matters. Vanier writes “These wounds are there for all ages and all time, to reveal the humble and forgiving love of Jesus who accepted to go to the utter end of love. The risen Jesus does not appear as the powerful one, but as the wounded and forgiving one. These wounds become his glory.” Thankfully, Jesus' scars remain; they tell us all we need to know about his character. They remind us that he journey’s with us in the trials of life. He does not come to overpower but to journey with. Walking in love will not always because human nature often abuses love but as Christians undying love is the cross we are called to bear.

One author pointed out the beauty of verse 22 when Jesus breathes on them. Once again it shows the closeness of their relationship. Of course there is powerful symbolism here of “God breathing the breath of life into people, the winds of Pentecost to come. But what if he actually breathed on them? What was that like? You have to be very close, physically, to someone before they can successfully breathe on you. Proximity to Jesus allows the sensation of his breath.”³

We’ve all heard sermons about “doubting Thomas.” Doubt is hardly praised in this story. If anything, Jesus dings him, contrasting him with those who haven’t seen and yet believe. But the peace I find in this story is that Jesus still, loves and treats Thomas with immense compassion. Wonder, doubt and questioning is a part of faith. Jesus is willing in the face of Thomas’ doubt to continue to journey with him just as he needs. Jesus invites him to touch the wounds. The Greek is graphic, with Jesus saying “thrust” or “press” or “cast” your finger into my side. Of course there are a thousand theologies on how this actually happened and what a resurrected Christ looks like, how real or metaphorical it was but for me these are not the things that matter - like I said from the beginning for me faith is about heart. I spent a lot of years reading and studying and trying to convince myself logically about Jesus and his journey. In fact when I did that it was the time I left the church because what it comes down to in the end is this great story is a story of undying love, and mysterious compassion that dares to transform our very lives heart and soul.

³ IBID