

Living as a Resurrection Community

1 John 3:1-7 Luke 24:36b-48
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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On Easter Sunday, I mentioned that no matter where you or I stand as to how we perceive the literalness of the Resurrection event itself, these stories point to an undeniable significance in understanding a basic premise that undergirds Christianity. So, in addition to looking at the theological significance of the Resurrection it is crucial we explore its practical implications in our individual lives and in the life of the community of faith.

It was several years ago that our Adult Church School class spent several months exploring and discussing the progressive Christianity 'Living the Questions' curriculum, *Saving Jesus Redux*. This is when many of us were first introduced to the term, "**practicing resurrection**". That sounded very strange at first. Most of us simply think of the Resurrection as some kind of ancient experience in the lives of Jesus' first disciples. **But to practice resurrection brings its implications into our own lives, calling us to put into action what it means to be Easter people.** As I shared on Easter Sunday, the curriculum states:

The real power of the Resurrection comes when the followers of Jesus become the body of Christ in the world, striving to bring new life to the world, to eradicate injustice, poverty, and violence.

In both the society at large and in people's personal lives: the practice of resurrection is about otherwise "dead" people being inwardly transformed and empowered to transform society.

How has your faith helped transform your life? Your relationships? The life of this community of faith? Society itself? **In and through these ancient stories of Jesus' Resurrection come real and concrete promises that indeed find evidence in our own reality: promises of hope, new life, and transformation.** I have no doubt that the Sacred Presence of Christ was very real to those first disciples, and that the same Presence is real in the church today, and also within each of us. By whatever means Christ was made real after Jesus' crucifixion, the followers of Jesus were transformed into a courageous, caring, and prophetic community.

One of the mysteries of Easter, then, is that a community of faith can be empowered, and along with its individual members, it can be transformed. The scriptures give evidence to various kinds of transformation. We see this evidence in the lives of individuals and communities of faith today.

- Transformed from fear to courage.
- Transformed from feelings of hate and resentment to love and forgiveness;
- Transformed from a sense of worthlessness to understanding oneself as a valued, blessed, and beloved child of God.

The New Testament reveals that perhaps the most important and powerful witness to the resurrection took the form of a community of faith in which people cared deeply for each other and took care of one another. In such a community, **people transcended their differences** – including the seemingly insurmountable barriers of culture, social status, religious backgrounds, and even race – in order to live together in unity, to demonstrate their love for one another, and to make sure that no one was left alone in their time of need. That is the kind of community that changed the world. That is the kind of community in whose heritage we stand.

Speaking frankly, however, I believe **the wider church today has a problem communicating this message of love and redemption because the church itself so often appears neither loving nor redeemed**. Therefore, a crucial element of our ministry is to help change that perception as we bear witness to the love and compassion that we have for one another, and for the forgiveness and reconciliation that we offer to each other when we feel we have been wronged. That includes not only within this particular congregation, but also must be extended to our fellow Presbyterian congregations, with other Christian denominations, with other faith traditions, and with those who claim no faith tradition.

Through all of our own diversity, our differences of opinion, our strengths and weaknesses, we must recognize that **as a resurrection community we are called to be a forgiving community. That's part of what it means to practice resurrection**.

Accomplishing that means stretching beyond even our own understanding of what it means to be inclusive. As today's Epistle reading from 1 John 3 reminds us, as children of God we are all part of God's family. Therefore, each and every one of you play an important and unique role in helping our community of faith to be all it can become. A place where the strong minister to the weak; the assured to the doubting; the calm to the angered; the healthy to the sick – all knowing full well that at some point in the future the situation will likely change and those *receiving* ministry will need to minister, because those who have been *offering* ministry will be in need of receiving ministry. **The real "proof" of the resurrection, therefore, isn't found by any verifiable scientific evidence. Rather, it is found in how we minister to and treat one another – both within this community of faith, within our families, and with those we meet each day.**

So, what are some **examples** of how we, as a community of faith, have been practicing resurrection? I want to briefly mention three. The most immediate examples occurred very recently. First, there was the event I will remember gratefully and humbly the rest of my life, the **10th Anniversary Dinner** that you hosted for me this past Friday evening. It reminded me that it is indeed often harder for me to receive than to give. Know that your expressions of love, support, and appreciation minister to me in profound ways. Thank you for practicing resurrection with me.

A second example also occurred recently. College Hill opened its doors, literally, to serve as a site to feed Tulsa Public School children affected by the **Teacher Walkout** the past two weeks, as have several of our fellow congregations. A special thanks to Terry Baxter for being our "man on the ground" to help coordinate volunteers and to spend his own days here at the church practicing resurrection.

And a third and final example I want to mention, among countless others, involves the experience of the **Confirmation Class** over the past six months. It was an honor and joy for me to serve as one of the leaders. The combined efforts from College Hill and Fellowship Congregational churches demonstrated in many ways what it means to practice resurrection. Whoever heard of a Confirmation Class that included

both Presbyterians and United Church of Christ youth and teachers? From a tradition standpoint, that was a real barrier breaker! More importantly, however, is the experience of the youth themselves as they studied, played, served together, and explored issues of faith. Our hope from the very beginning wasn't so much on how well they learned the basics of our denominations, or even how fully they understood theological issues that are complex for everybody. Instead, it was **the experience of developing meaningful and genuine community as a group**. This is something they will remember, and it will make an impact on their lives in understanding **the positive role that an authentic community of faith can make in one's life**.

So, I leave you with this charge: Live into the promises revealed in the mystery of the resurrection: Hope. New life. Transformation. For in doing so, we bear witness to the Sacred Presence in our midst. That is how practicing resurrection becomes a reality for us, as we live out what it means to be an inclusive, forgiving, and loving community of faith.

Amen.