

Practicing Resurrection - Virtually

Easter Sunday

John 20:1-18
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman
April 12, 2020

Over the past few weeks I've thought about how hollow, maybe even horrible it would be to try to celebrate Easter Sunday over a virtual video instead of in person. But after the past few weeks of virtual worship, adding to our intentional efforts to find ways to connect with one another, perhaps it's one of the silver linings in this dark cloud of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic.

I've heard from more than one pastoral colleague, and even thought about it a few weeks ago myself, that perhaps we should call this First Easter while we are distanced from each other in our homes. And then, when we're able to return and reunite in person, a homecoming, if you will, then as the re-gathered resurrected community of faith, we can have a Second Easter. I'll be thinking about that.

Even on this strange and a bit awkward Easter Sunday, the most important thing we can do is to pay attention to and reflect upon the meaning of the resurrection, and then take action. Over the years, I've been trying to find the most meaningful way to summarize the mysterious meaning behind the stories of Jesus' death and resurrection. Here's my current summary. **God has completely taken care of whatever it is that you or I, or church theologians from ages past, or the biblical authors themselves, believe has separated us from the grace of God and eternal life.** Yes, these stories do contain real power, for without an understanding of the cross and the empty tomb the faith tradition known as Christianity would have never developed. Nor would we have any knowledge of Jesus' teachings, his life and ministry.

This morning we heard the resurrection account from the Gospel of John. And yes, when compared with the narratives in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there are many discrepancies and apparent contradictions with one another concerning what actually happened on Easter morning. Without going into all the details of their differences, progressive biblical scholars have long recognized that each of the four gospel writers simply had their own important theological points to make, and the details they added or subtracted were intentionally part of the meaning they wanted to get across. Saying that, there *is* truth to be revealed in and through each of these, and every other story in the Bible. But as we have learned here at College Hill, **something doesn't have to be an historical fact and eyewitness literal account in order for it to contain truth.**

The Rev. Carl Gregg, posting a blog entitled, "*Practice Resurrection*": *Progressive Christian Theology for Easter*, puts it into perspective the way I am now convinced is the best way to approach Easter. He writes:

I invite you to consider that we should worry *less* about what people say they believe happened one Sunday morning 2,000 years ago and *more* about [whether] we are living as if resurrection still happens.

who are forced to live on their knees, when I speak for those who have had their tongues torn out, when I cry for those who have no more tears left to shed."

This is a profound reflection. So again, I ask: How are you and I, and we together as a congregation, practicing resurrection? Conversely, when and how do we deny the resurrection? A fuller understanding of resurrection and of Easter, then, are finally not just about the 'way back then' or the 'way off in the future,' but today! Remember that we are filled with the same Spirit, the same Sacred Presence that was in Jesus. That Spirit, then and now, can redeem life, can infuse hope, and can move you and I, as well as the people and circumstances around us, toward new life.

To paraphrase Clarence Jordan, the proof that God raised Jesus from the dead is not the empty tomb, vacant grave and a rolled away stone, but the full hearts of his transformed disciples, a spirit-filled fellowship, and a carried-away church. So, after you ponder what it is you believe about resurrection, the next and more important question becomes, to what will be your *response*? And in all honesty, **during all the circumstances of dealing with this isolating pandemic, I have seen a myriad of tangible ways people are practicing resurrection. Any time we experience a glimmer of hope, any time we reach out to connect with another, every time we realize we are not fully in control, we are practicing resurrection – even if virtually for the time being.**

Amen.

Resources:

Carl Gregg, "'Practicing Resurrection': Progressive Christian Theology for Easter, March 30, 2012, patheos.com
Saving Jesus Redux - Lesson 11: Resurrection, Living the Questions DVD and print curriculum.