

April 21, 2019

Resurrection Moment

Prayer

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto thee. Oh Lord our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon

Well, with after what has seemed like a very long week... I don't know about for you, but for me a very long week... we've gone from a Triumphant Entry to special time that Jesus spent with His disciples. Sharing with them, giving them some last teachings, offerings if you will, as He heads closer and closer to His Passion. We heard on Thursday how He served His disciples with the understanding that they would understand that they were called to serve others. He fed the disciples with a meal that was familiar, and yet given new meaning as He fed them with the first Eucharist. And He gave them one commandment. To love one another as He had loved them during their time together.

From there, He goes on and He has some special time spent apart from the disciples. As He contemplates, as He prays about the time that is set squarely in front of Him. Where He is reminded that the path that He is traveling in obedience to God is one that is painful. One that will cause agony, one that He is, quite frankly, afraid of. And yet, He presents Himself to God, the humanity of Jesus presents Himself to God. To have God's will be done in Him; to be obedient to the very end. Because it is from obedience, and from God's love and Jesus' love for His fellow human beings, that He is able to take those next steps. "Not my will, but yours be done." Where He endures a trial, where He endures a beating, where He endures the crucifixion.

We took time to remember, to be there, to see and to know and to understand the great love and obedience of Jesus, on our behalf, done for us. Then we have that day of waiting. That day of not being sure, certainly the disciples were not. Where do we go from here? What do we do now? We were so hopeful, we learned so much. We were told so much that we still didn't understand. Where do we go from here?

It is not until the women come back from the tomb. The women who had gone to perform the burial rites that they didn't have the time to perform on that Sabbath day, that Friday. And they come back with this story, a story of an empty tomb. They knew it was the right place. They had followed when Jesus' body had been taken and laid in that place. They were surprised, but certainly happy, one would think, when they saw that the tomb was open. That the rock had been rolled away. And yet when they looked inside, just the burial cloths left, and the body of Jesus gone. Two men in dazzling clothes speak to them; "Why are you looking for the living among the dead?"

Not saying that Jesus hadn't died, but that He had died and been risen. He has been raised from the dead.

And now the real story begins. Now the story of what shall we do, how do we respond, what does it mean for the body of Jesus to be gone? How does that affect who we are, and what we are becoming? So, the women go back, and they tell the Apostles, these men who had been traveling with Jesus for three years. Listening to His teachings, hearing the parables, seeing the healings, participating in the feeding of the multitudes. Even hearing Jesus Himself say that He had to endure this time. That He had to go through this in obedience to God. For the love of God, and for God's love for us, He must go through these things. But not to be afraid because He would be raised from the dead.

And what was the Apostles' response when the women came and said the tomb was empty? They said, "Come on. What's really going on here? Did you go to the wrong place? Are you seeing things?" Yeah? They weren't convinced. But Peter, again, is the one; he gets up, and he goes to the tomb. He's got to see this for himself. He's got to know and understand what these women think they're talking about. And Luke says he goes, and he looks into the tomb, and he finds it just as the women had said. And there we're left. Doesn't say his heart was changed. Doesn't say that the Holy Spirit connected with him in a special way, and he went back and told the disciples, that they all rejoiced. He just saw that it was the way the women had said.

So what does it all mean? Why are you all here today? What's so special about Easter? I mean after all, we've celebrated Christmas, the Incarnation. That's a good thing. God and humanity came together so that we could know and understand God better. So God could know us even deeper. In the Anglican Church we focus on incarnation a lot because it's very important that God and humanity has joined together in this person that we know as Jesus, to help us to understand all of the other things that He's gone through. We've celebrated, observed, all the things that Jesus has said and done. The miracles, the epiphanies, revealing Himself over and over to the people. As He tries to invite them, as He tries to embrace them, as He tries to bring them in. To know and understand that God loves them so completely that He will not leave them in their sinfulness. That if you will only hear, if you will only come, if you will only repent, then the forgiveness of God is being offered, and offered in a new way, and a powerful way, and it's coming. It's coming.

We go through the Passion week, and we try to understand why it has to be this way. Sometimes that's difficult for us to grasp. You've heard the line, I'm sure, that Jesus was born to die for our sins? That seems kind of trite, and yet kind of true. He died on the cross, and the questions abound; was He not the Messiah; was He not the one that we were looking for; was He not the one to bring us that forgiveness from God? Until we understood that death was not the end. It is this resurrection moment. A moment that we can't begin to fully understand. A moment that we cannot at all explain; but to

know the truth of it. To know that what Jesus said about His time on earth, His ministry for us, His death on our behalf, the atonement that took place, was true. Because He has been raised, because the tomb is empty, because from this point on we now have the stories of His appearances.

It would have been too easy for the body to have been moved, and for the Jewish hierarchy, and the Romans, to say, "This is, simply, somebody stole the body. Your leader is dead. Forget about him who is leading you astray, according to the Jews. He was an insurrectionist that was about to raise a response to the Romans, and that's been taken care of."

If His death were the end of the story, then those would be the storylines that we would hear. But that's not it. His promise from God was true; death will last only a moment. New life, eternal life, a glorified life, a glorified body, will all be yours. And you will not be the only, you will be the first. The first to have this moment, the first to have this resurrection. But it is the promise for all people, for all who hear, for all who believe, for all who will follow. For all who believe and want to be a part of the Kingdom of God, this is a promise that we have been given. That death, though it looms in front of us all, will only be a moment, and that we, too, will be raised to a new life.

We who have found a new and deeper relationship with God, through the sacrifice of Christ, and through the giving of the Holy Spirit. Are preparing ourselves for that eternal life in the very presence, the fullness of the presence, of God. That is what the Resurrection moment means for us. That we do not need to be afraid any more. That we are God's children just as Jesus is God's Son, and the promise that was made to Him, and through Him, is the promise that we cling to, is the promise that we celebrate here today. That death has no sway over us. It is but a moment, a moment when this life ends, and our life in the fullness of God's Kingdom begins. We come together to celebrate that moment. We come to celebrate that promise. Let us rejoice in the promise of God, knowing that as Jesus was raised from the dead, so you and I will also be raised into God's Kingdom.

Gregory Hein, Rector