

Christ's Resurrection...and Our Own

A Sermon for Every Sunday

1 Corinthians 15:12-20
The Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

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Many churches use the Revised Common Lectionary to plan scriptural themes for worship. The Lectionary, you are likely aware, is a “system” of sorts that seeks to walk us through the majority of the Bible’s overarching narrative over the course of 3 years (year A, B, and C, and then the system starts all over again). The lectionary offers us each Sunday a lesson from the Hebrew Bible, a Psalm, a Gospel reading, and another New Testament lesson. There are some different lectionary systems, but I’m most familiar with the Revised Common Lectionary, which, by the way, is what *A Sermon for Every Sunday* uses to ensure that the sermons you hear through this ministry remain fresh and vibrant and cover the breadth of Scripture.

Well, the lectionary has taken us on a bit of a journey through 1 Corinthians the past several weeks. Among the issues that Paul addresses with the Corinthian church is that Paul finds this church to be disjointed, lacking in unity. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that over the past few weeks, we have been reading about Paul’s appeal to the Corinthians based upon common ground.

In chapter 12, he encourages the Corinthians to discover or uncover the spiritual gifts that we all have been given. What’s more, these gifts are made all the more powerful when we use them together in service to God and the church. In chapter 13, one of the more well-known chapters in Scripture, Paul appeals to the love we share, the love we have from God, the patient, kind, selfless love that should serve as the very

foundation of who we are as people of faith. If we do not have love, Paul says, we have nothing.

Well, today Paul takes the gloves off. Here, he tackles some conflict head on. It appears that he has discovered that some Corinthians were doubting the resurrection. Rather than being pastoral and sympathetic, Paul calls them out on it. And for him, there is no wiggle room. If resurrection is not true, he says, then what's the point at all? For Paul, the entirety of our faith rests on the resurrection—the resurrection of Christ, and our own.

Paul seems to make a circuitous argument here about the resurrection. Just like any preacher who struggles to make their point and move on, Paul says, “if Christ is raised, how can you say there is no resurrection? If there is no resurrection, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, then our faith is in vain. If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. But Christ has been raised.” And that's the abbreviated version.

What is Paul getting at here? Is he laying out a systematic theology of resurrection, or explaining the science of how all this works? Is he wanting to provide us the opportunity to lay out a convincing and rational argument as to why resurrection is true, and to be believed? No. I don't believe so. See, resurrection defies all rationality. It doesn't make any logical sense. We don't believe in it because it makes sense, we believe it because we've experienced it.

Diana Butler Bass spoke once of attending Trinity Episcopal Church in Santa Barbara, California. It was there that she had occasion to meet the Rt. Rev. Daniel Corrigan. Now deceased, Bishop Corrigan, Diana says, was “one of those mid-20th

century liberal princes of the pulpit,” known for his support for the ordination of women and causes of social justice.

Bishop Corrigan happened to be preaching at Trinity one Sunday right before Easter. After worship, someone came up to him and asked, “Bishop Corrigan, do you really believe the resurrection?” Diana said that she was eagerly awaiting his answer, for “there was no way that Bishop Corrigan believed in a literal resurrection,” Diana said. Yet Bishop Corrigan replied to this parishioner without pause, “Yes. I believe in the resurrection. I’ve seen it too many times not to.”¹

This faithful worshiper’s question of Bishop Corrigan, and his response, causes me to wonder whether we have greater difficulty believing in Christ’s resurrection...or our own.

And even if we do believe in our resurrection, most often we associate that with what happens to us after we die. And yes, Paul is speaking here about bodily resurrection, but I believe if we make resurrection only a post-mortem proposition, we’ve missed something. Because the truth is, resurrection is as much about the present as it is the future. Perhaps therein lies some of our difficulty.

As of recently, COVID has claimed more than 870,000 deaths in US, and more than 5 1/2 Million deaths worldwide. At the same time, teenagers unmercifully die in school shootings, mothers still die in childbirth, friends suffer with depression, children are abused, neighbors experience loneliness and neglect. You don’t have to look far...deep grief and loss is all around us. What hope is there for the resurrection? And I don’t mean *someday*, I mean *today*.

¹ Diana Butler Bass, [*Believing the Resurrection*](#).

While I don't mean to minimize any of that death and devastation, I wonder if simply naming it, lamenting aloud over it, crying out to God in honesty and pain... I wonder if that just might help us to trust that God can take all our death, and give birth to new life—in us and among us.

I love how Ron Luckey puts it: “[The Resurrection] is about more than a fortunate Jewish rabbi being raised from the dead. It's about the whole world being raised from the dead when he was raised... [It] gives us the hope that the way things have always been will not always be, because Jesus is alive.”²

Resurrection is about today too.

If your church is like mine, almost every Easter Sunday we sing that well-known hymn *Christ the Lord is Risen Today!* Friends, I have to tell you, each time I sing it, there is a line that gets me every time. A lump appears in my throat and tears come to my eyes. *Made like him, like him we rise.*

Because Christ has risen, so can we. Wherever we have given in to despair. Whenever we are convinced we can't go on. Whenever we feel as if there is no more living, the light and love of the resurrected Christ call us to rise again.

Not tomorrow... today. The resurrection Jesus experienced is the same resurrection God gives today to you and me.

May I tell you about my friend Margaret? She died a couple of years ago at the age of 101. Margaret was, as we say in the south, she was a character. Margaret was a member of my former church and despite being in her late 90s, she'd often disguise her

² Ronald G, Luckey, [*Well, What Can You Expect?*](#).

voice to make prank calls to my house, or meet me in my office before worship to tell me a joke that I could never repeat in the pulpit. Oh, how I loved Margaret.

About eight years ago, Margaret's son Doug was very sick, near the end. At a Wednesday night supper at church, Margaret's daughter Peggy came to me and said "Doug's probably not going to make it long. I know Mom would like to see you." I said, "I'm sorry to hear that, Peggy. Sure, I'll go by the house tomorrow."

The next day came and I am ashamed to admit this, but it slipped my mind and I forgot to go see her. I can say I was really busy, or I can say that on Wednesday night at church I had a million other things on my mind. I could proclaim up and down that it was an honest mistake, but those are just excuses. The truth is...I just forgot.

When Peggy called me a couple days later say that Doug had died, my heart sank, and I immediately realized what I had done. I said I would go by, but I forgot. And I knew that I needed to go and face Margaret and apologize.

I knocked on the door and Margaret called for me to come in. She was sitting in a recliner in the living room—her eyes were red with tears. I sat down on the sofa across from her and after a long silence, she said, "Daniel, you were supposed to come by, and you didn't. You said you would, and you didn't."

At this point my eyes filled with tears. After telling me of her pain, Margaret said sternly, "Now you get over here." I thought she was going to turn me across her lap and wear me out. But instead, she reached those bony and trembling fingers around my neck and pulled me in close for an embrace. Margaret then took my face in her hands said to me those words my heart needed to hear, "Daniel, I forgive you."

At that moment, I believed in resurrection. I had just experienced it.

I suspect you know what I'm talking about. Whether you gave someone the gift of forgiveness, or received a second chance yourself, or any of the myriad ways Christ brings us new life, I suspect you have your own story of resurrection too.

So as we go forth today, let us do so with renewed hope, receiving and embracing God's transforming and resurrecting love. For with God, all things are made new—even you!

Amen.

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