

Pastor Roy's sermon from April 15, 2018

Today is the third Sunday of Easter. We are living into the resurrection of Christ. I have been asking the question, "Why does the resurrection matter? How does it define our life as a congregation?"

The writers of the New Testament speak broadly of Jesus' resurrection. Generally their expectation is that resurrection involves new life with a new body. So it is not mainly a bodiless spiritual experience but an oddly physical one as well. Beginning with a simple idea, I find the New Testament writers leaning into a more mystical reality—not easily defined or controlled by what we can or cannot understand. Often they write of the human experience, but at times they look forward to the redemption of the entire universe.

Personally, I am drawn to the mystical and I love to think about all of life in constant communion with God. Especially the parts of creation that do not use words to describe it. Clearly humanity resists and has the power to resist this communion. Another way of putting it is that we often fail to receive all the mercy that God has for us. We call this sin.

But I believe we kid ourselves if we think that we or anyone can successfully and finally resist the mercies of God. Go ahead and try. Receiving the mercy of God is as simple as eating, drinking, and breathing. We can't help but receive, even though we might not find words to describe it.

If you give a child the right words, the right prayers, she or he will be a friend of God. If you force them to be an enemy of God, they will picture themselves as that as well. The same is true for all, especially those who are pushed to the fringes. This reminds me of what Jesus told his followers last week. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain their sins, they are retained.

Our reading from Acts illustrates this. Peter and John notice the ignored, paralyzed man with whom most people avoided eye contact. Most wished he would just receive a penny and remain invisible. But Peter and John get his attention, and invite him to walk. It would have been less trouble to throw a dollar at him. The poor, disabled man mattered. His body mattered. Whether or not he could walk mattered. The loving welcome of God pushed them to care and welcome even those whom most dismissed and ignored. Peter and John gave him the experience and words and he was instantly a friend of God, living in the power and mercy of the resurrection of Jesus. His life became a sign of God's mercy.

Listen to what John the Elder writes in I John 3: See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

John is not pretending to know the unknowable. His message is simple. Whatever happened to Jesus-- and something amazing happened which gives us courage to live and love--that is going to happen to us also. Jesus went first. We follow. We have nothing to fear, because our life now and in the future is held in the hands of a gracious, merciful, good, and loving God.

So according to John, we know we are children of God. Our vision of the future is for a continuation of the good mercy of God as we experience it in the world today. God is at work and this work will continue, faithfully. Whatever comes on the other side of death will be good, because we are united with Christ in God's love. What we are now is what we will continue to be. Children of God.

Luke's resurrection story is a continuation of Jesus' life before he died. "Why are you frightened, why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." Jesus' life has not ended. Jesus' life is bound up in the life of God. His life which goes on in us is a continuation of the life he lived. Resurrection life has no boundaries, but goes on in us as we give ourselves over to the faithfulness of Christ. This is not our doing. This is the gift of God. This is the hope of the resurrection. It is not a narrow hope. The love of God has set it in motion and it cannot be stopped.

The Scriptures invite us to see Jesus' resurrection as the link between the life we know this side of death, with the fullness of life throughout time and space. This union for us as Christians is established and revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. May we continue to give ourselves over to the richness of the resurrection which is communion with God and all of God's life everywhere it is found. Thanks be to God. Amen.