

Pastor Roy's Sermon from April 8, 2018 (2nd Sunday of Easter)

It is helpful that Easter spans 7 weeks. The season of Christmas lasts two weeks or less. I'm thinking we find it easier to embrace Jesus as "God with us" than to wrap our heads and hearts around the resurrection of our crucified Lord. We know what it means for a baby to be born. Every baby is a miracle. Each one. The faith of Christmas is stepping from a common miracle to a new intimacy between God and humanity--a new miracle which opens our hearts to a fresh way of knowing God and ourselves.

Quite differently, when someone we love dies, we can't help but feel that as a loss. Yes, we believe they have entered a new and more intimately connected eternal life with God. But we clearly haven't experienced it, as we have the birth of a baby. So the resurrection is just beyond our touch. When someone or something dies, life departs. For the body to be rejoined with the departed life--this is not something we have seen. If we're honest, it's hard to imagine. The apostle Paul believed quite clearly that in resurrection the body is rejoined with the spirit soul. The early church seems to have held nothing back from Jesus victory over death. They left no room for death to have the last word. Life will prevail. Sin and despair are doomed. The love and life of God are preeminent.

The women at the tomb and the disciples in the upper room both come face to face with this new life of Jesus beyond death, and to be honest, they still struggle a bit with it. As the risen Lord walks among them, he is alive--no longer lost, no longer hidden. In faith he is right before them. Here is a brand new hope--he is not dead but alive. And yet it wasn't obvious to everyone--only to those who were open to and welcomed his new way of being with them. According to Luke, it came slowly to the disciples. According to Matthew, some of Jesus' followers doubted at the same moment that some believed and worshipped.

Thomas doesn't believe until he sees Jesus in person, despite the disciples' assurances that he appeared to them. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who believe even though they have not seen."

The resurrected Jesus in the Gospel of John calls on his followers to receive the Holy Spirit, to forgive sins, and to tend his sheep.

Believing in the resurrection is not mainly thinking something about Jesus or about our future. Trusting in the resurrection is to lean into it, to live into it. In John's language, to welcome God's Spirit, to forgive, to nurture faith within ourselves and around us--these are the attitudes of those who embrace Christ's resurrection and the power of resurrection at work in the world today. The Epistle of John says, "Love is from God, everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The power of resurrection is love, nurture, and life expanding in ever larger circles.

We can try to split theological hairs about what it means to believe in the resurrection, and we are tempted to expect folks around us to believe exactly as we believe, but the whole of the Scriptures suggest that love, generosity, faithfulness, and faith in God's welcome--these are the power of resurrection at work in our world. This power of unstoppable life and love is very, very simple. Everything which Jesus proclaimed, lived, and died for, is the gift of God--life freely

given and available. Salvation is as simple as a seed planted, growing into a tree nurtured by God with the rain and sun.

Resurrection is the love of God bringing life and peace to all who receive it. Sometimes we restrict it, overcomplicate it, put walls around it with the expectation that others will use the same language to describe it and experience it as we do. Everything we practice as Christians, baptism, communion, confession and assurance—these point in their essence to this reality of resurrection life freely given by God in the love of Jesus Christ for all.

What must we believe about the resurrection to live into its fullness and mercy? We believe in the freely given life and love of God. We receive the love of God's creation. It is eternal life all around us. There are no limits. Our job during this season of Easter is to welcome Jesus among us, meditate on the reality of resurrection all around us and within us in Christ. We think of Lent as the season of discipline. But the discipline of Easter is to welcome our risen Lord however and as often as we can. Christ is among us. Love is within us, bonds us together, and goes out from this congregation in ever widening circles. This is the power of the resurrection at work. Let us share this joyful love with courage and faithfulness. Amen.