

Living Resurrection

Acts 10:34-43

Colossians 3:1-4

Matthew 28:1-10

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

How many of you got wet when the bishop sprinkled holy water on the palms last Sunday? For how many of you was that a first? When holy water is sprinkled on us, it is called asperges, from the Latin, “sprinkle.” The sprinkling of holy water is meant to remind us of our baptism. To be asperged is to remember that we are cleansed from our sins. So, if Bishop Harris soaked any of you, I hope the memory brings you joy!

In our reading from Colossians this morning, Paul starts by saying, “if you have been raised with Christ.” This too is a reference to baptism. Episcopalians typically associate baptism with a little round font and a shell sprinkling droplets of water, but the more authentic symbol of baptism is full immersion. I’m sorry to have to tell you, but our prayer book agrees with the Baptists on this issue. When Paul talks about being raised with Christ it is because the symbol of baptism is meant to image us going all the way under the water as though buried and then reemerging as if resurrected and reborn, “raised with Christ.” If you read the fine print rubrics in your prayer book, you will see that full immersion is the church’s preferred method of baptism, even for Episcopalians.

One of the reasons the symbol of baptismal immersion is so powerful is because it really does illicit the image of resurrection, a new beginning. It is an entry point into something entirely different. Once we emerge from the baptismal waters, once we have died to our old selves and risen with Christ, we live in a new way. Our orientation changes. We are no longer bound by earthly thinking; now we seek the things beyond our merely temporal concerns.

Before Christian baptism was a thing, David understood the idea but used a different metaphor. In today’s Psalm, David talks about choosing a life dedicated to God as walking through “the

gate of righteousness,” “the gate of the Lord.” Following God has always required crossing a threshold, moving deliberately into a new way of being with different priorities and purposes. Jesus was the only man to live this perfectly, but he did leave an example for us to follow.

Today’s Psalm falls in a group called the Hallel Psalms. They would have been sung during the Passover meal. In other words, Jesus would have sung this Psalm at the Last Supper, the night before his death. This Psalm is in praise of God’s strength and victory. It declares that death is not the end, because life proclaiming God’s salvation will always triumph. And Jesus demonstrates this strength of a mind set on things above by singing an anthem of praise as he stood at the threshold of his own death. For Jesus, this way of thinking was not mere lip service. He KNEW the love of God was far more powerful than the bonds of death, so he was able to walk through death with praise on his lips and find resurrection on the other side.

It isn’t easy though, this reoriented way of thinking. We live on earth, surrounded and shaped by earthly priorities. Seeking things above does not come naturally to us, which is why Paul encourages us to persist. It’s also why it’s good to occasionally have someone sprinkle us with holy water. But what does it mean to have a heavenly mindset anyway? We are resurrection people, here on Easter celebrating God’s victory over death and our ability to experience salvation in this life and the next. But what does this mindset really look like in practice?!

Living a life with our mind set on things above does not mean thinking about chubby angels that look like babies or an opaque godlike figure shrouded in fluffy clouds. No. Each week we pray, “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.” This prayer asks God to show us how to live the priorities of God in our life on earth. This has never come naturally, which is why we pray for it. We do not know how to do it without God’s help because the structure of Heaven is so completely different. In God’s kingdom, Jesus’ example teaches us to sacrifice our strength to liberate and empower others.

Today's reading from Acts is from the story of the Holy Spirit's outpouring among the gentiles. If you recall, the Holy Spirit was given to the Jews in chapter two. Until this moment, the assumption was that the gentiles could become God's people, but they had to convert to Judaism first. That had been the case since the Law was given on Sinai 1500 years earlier. It was all they knew. But the gospel was starting to spread beyond the boundaries of Judaism. Gentiles were beginning to hear and claim it. But Gentiles had not yet received the anointing of the Spirit. Today's story takes place ten years after Pentecost! A decade after Jesus had told the apostles to take the gospel beyond Jerusalem, and the church was **finally** beginning to reach the edges of Jewish boundary lines. This story is not just about God's grace extending beyond human control, it is about the church beginning to realize they were never the ones in control of God's spirit to begin with, and they certainly were not the gatekeepers of God's love. This story is about the apostles finally realizing what God has been working towards all along!

When Peter recounts the story of Jesus to the Gentiles in today's reading, he says Jesus came preaching peace, and healing those oppressed by the devil. The devil is "diabolos," the slanderer, the adversary. Jesus was the liberator of the oppressed, the suffering, and of everyone whose body or soul was being exploited by the enemy of life. The people Jesus chose to heal were the ones the world hated, the slandered, the outsiders. It took the disciples three years of ministry with Jesus in life and ten years after his death to realize that enacting the priorities of heaven meant centering the lives and voices of those outside the protection of the established order. The apostles finally saw what the Spirit was doing through loving and freeing those the devil and the world hated. And now it is for us to continue to let this work unfold. First, we must let our minds be open to the things above, because God's love will always surprise and challenge our boundaries.

Today's resurrection account from Matthew essentially demonstrates the same thing. God privileges those the world ignores and rejects. It was the women who show up at the tomb, who have an angel speak to them, and then the resurrected Christ himself gives them the message to declare to the men. At that point in time, women were understood to be property; their

credibility was suspect at best, and yet Jesus gave them the most important message ever to be delivered. Everything about the mind set on things above transforms our elevation of human worth. To emphasize the point, Matthew positions these women in contrast with the Roman soldiers. Roman soldiers were icons of human strength, yet they become as dead men from fear. Then the women, powerless and voiceless, were entrusted with **THE** Easter proclamation!

Today's Psalm says that the builders themselves rejected the CHIEF cornerstone. Jesus, the chief cornerstone, has often been misunderstood. If we fail to understand and participate with God's work, we become like the builders, rejecting the very people Jesus prioritized, rejecting Jesus himself.

When we are raised with Christ, emerging from baptismal waters, Paul says that our lives are hidden with Christ in God. Our life is now bound up with God's. In Christ, we have resurrection power flowing through us. Our lives have ceased being merely about retaining existence, because we have already died. Now our lives take on the purpose of participation with God's life, with enacting the work of Jesus. -With Jesus and as Jesus, we oppose anything that would distort or diminish human life. We bring resurrection and hope to those who have known only death and suffering. With Jesus we empower the oppressed to experience and proclaim the risen life of Christ. When we set our minds on things above, we begin to bring the ways of God into the experience of the world around us.

Jesus sang of God's victory in the face of his own death; he walked through the gates of death knowing death cannot stop the lifegiving vitality of God's love. Our destiny is now tied with Christ's. It is in our hands, through the resurrection power of the Spirit, to enact the God's kingdom here on earth.

May we walk each day as though dripping, having emerged from the baptismal waters, intent on God's Kingdom, liberating the oppressed, healing the suffering, and living resurrection into every human heart.