



ST BART'S

A Sermon by
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Doing Resurrection

*Sermon preached at the eleven o'clock service, April 19, 2015
The Third Sunday of Easter: Based on Luke 24:36b-48*

It is time for us to do something with resurrection. I am not sure exactly what to do with it; but by the third Sunday of Easter, it is time for us to decide what the story means. And if we can't do that definitively—and I am pretty sure we can't—then at the very least we need to decide what difference any of it makes to us. The way we live our lives depends upon it.

In some ways it would be easier if Easter were only a day, not a season. If that were true, we could wrap it up as a one-off event, albeit a glorious one filled with everything we love from people to flowers to music, but in the end just a day. With great wisdom, though, the church requires us to live in Easter for fifty glorious days, the time between Easter and the Day of Pentecost, inviting us to practice living in the reality of resurrection.

It is not an easy concept, and the struggle with it is far from new. The disciples had great difficulty with it. Far from getting it once and for all, they had to be reassured again and again. The gospel narrators, each of whom eventually had something to say about a post-resurrection experience with Jesus, write about these events as though making a point, causing us to wonder if the stories are more a function of polemic than of story telling, the beginning of establishing a doctrinal understanding. In the passage just before the one we read this morning there is a very famous story of Jesus coming to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Jesus appears incognito among the disciples, begins to teach them and becomes known to them only when he begins to break bread among them. It doesn't take a biblical scholar to read the account in part as a story to argue the case for the practice of the Eucharist. To this day it remains our practice and our fundamental understanding. "Be known to us, Lord Jesus," we pray and sing, "in the breaking of the bread."

The lesson appointed for this morning follows immediately upon the heels of the Emmaus story. In it, the same disciples are now gathered just a little while later; and, yet, once again, according to the narrative, they are unbelieving and in need of a sign. Maybe there is something else going on here. It could be argued that the setting is simply a literary vehicle for another point that Luke wishes to make: this time to emphasize the physical resuscitation of Jesus. By the time Luke was written, the story was 50 years old, and it was important to emphasize that the Savior in the gospel remained quite alive. The most direct way to do that was to claim, no doubt to a group of loud detractors, that Jesus' presence was not simply spiritual (as though spiritual is ever simple) but quite physical. Luke's Jesus says, "Touch me, feel my flesh and bones; I am not a ghost." To further the point, Luke has Jesus eat fish, an act that is the essence of embodiment, far from ethereal and very real.

Many of us as modern people struggle with these stories. We love them, but we struggle with them. And there is nothing wrong with that. The pitfall is that in the struggle many simply come to see these stories, outlandish in any understanding of them, as quaint, charming and not ever to be taken seriously. In part, I think that they are right: these stories are not to be taken seriously if by that we mean to take them literally. But if we dismiss them as fundamentally untruthful as well as non-historical, we then are left *in my opinion* with an almost insurmountable conundrum for us as Christians. While these stories may not literally have happened, the Christian story, the way in which we most fully appropriate the reality of God for us as Christians, does, I believe, depend upon resurrection, the presence of something beyond the grave. Resurrection—perhaps re-imagined, reconsidered—is crucial to the story. Without it, there can be other good and faithful and true stories, but they are not the Christian story. The Christian story depends upon resurrection.

All of which returns me to my opening point this morning: it is time for us to do something with resurrection. I use the words "do something with it" because we have little hope of "getting it, explaining it, or even believing it"—certainly in

any linear way. That is okay. Such linearity is not the only or even best way of grabbing on to something, because that way of understanding depends upon facts, which are always changing and are always subject to new information. The answer, I believe, is to give our hearts to the hope of resurrection whereby we may begin to understand anew what it can mean even for modern people to say: “Christ is risen.” Then the acclamation lives in our hearts because it is a living, breathing proposition, not because it is something we are bound to believe.

What would life in Easter look like if we wrote some new post-resurrection stories? Could we do it? Would we have to struggle with content development or might we find that resurrection lives all around us? What if we liberated ourselves from trying so hard to believe an ancient story and simply gave ourselves over to what the story still means today? Could it change our lives? I believe that it could. Here are three brief examples of the kind of process I am imagining.

In his book *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*, Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, without calling it such, describes a life of resurrection, a new reclaiming of an old way of living as though Christ is risen. As the title suggests, he rejects the craziness of our culture—and we all know what he is talking about. Living as people who know resurrection in our hearts can never happen, he argues, until we free ourselves from several things:

- the insistent clamor for more and more stuff,
- the growing belief that there is a technological answer for every human problem,
- the compulsion to fill every free moment of our time and that of our children with something productive and educational,
- and the unreflective reliance upon advertising as the source of our next great desire.

Only then, only when we come to live as people who refuse to be shaped by the whim of our culture, can Christ truly be risen for us.

An ESPN reporter was suspended this week after an abusive, mean and profane tirade was caught on camera. In it she denigrated an attendant in the garage where her car had been towed. If you have missed the story, don't Google it. It is an example of living that is not characterized by resurrection. And the only reason I mention it is not to jump on the bandwagon of condemning this outrageous behavior (that has been widely done with as much vitriol as the original incident) but to confess that such meanness lives near the surface for most of us. It is, of course, simplistic to say that the world needs to be less mean; and, yet, I say it anyway because we need to hear it. Our predilection for aggressive consumption includes in it a notion that the slightest offense—anything from our car being towed, which is not so slight, to the mildest imperfection in the impeccable service we have come to expect—deserves to be summarily and harshly noted, criticized and corrected. In the process we have become little tyrants, and it is not pretty. If gentleness and kindness must be sacrificed at the altar of standing up for ourselves, the cost may be too high. Christ is risen for us only when we refuse to give in again and again to our worst instincts.

On the radio yesterday I happened to hear of a suicide bomber killing 33 people in Afghanistan. At the most, I may have thought, “How awful; thank goodness it wasn't 3000.” What is remarkable to me is how little notice I gave it. Please hear me on this: I *know* that we cannot allow every horrific detail to stop us in our tracks, filling us with paralyzing grief, fear and dread; but when we become utterly numb, we experience all that comes with numbness—detachment, a lack of empathy, disregard for those beyond our immediate circle, etc. When Christ is risen in our lives, we are more alive, not less. We hurt, we question, we pray, and we do not ignore.

The resurrection changes everything; and mostly it changes us.

In the name of God: *Amen*.