

Because of the Resurrection - Live Differently!

Acts a 10:34-43

1 Cor 15:19-26

Psalm 118:1-2,14-24

Luke 24:1-12

He is risen! He is risen indeed!

Believing in the resurrection changes everything, doesn't it?! It's as if a light has come on in otherwise complete darkness! It's as if a dull, colorless world suddenly is shining with brilliant color!

I bought this book recently, entitled "Shine" by author Dagny Griffin, illustrated by Laura Bobbiesi. It's a wordless book (one where almost everything is communicated through the drawings) except for the first page that shares a Bible verse from Matthew 5:14 - "You are the light that gives light to the world. A city that is built on a hill cannot be hidden."

It's a story in pictures about how a little girl with love in her heart for Jesus and others lives as a light in an otherwise gray, colorless world. The light within her, helps her to see colors and beauty all around her, wherever she goes. She spreads that light of love to others, so that the ability to see beauty spreads to them too. Not everyone accepts the light though. There's one character in the story that rejects the love offered. That's nothing new, is it(?) as this week we have been remembering what Jesus went through leading up to his death...

Oh how we need things like love, truth, hope, faith, beauty, to bring color to our world! There is so much beauty to take in, but it can be lost on people whose lives are loveless and hopeless.

As I was thinking about death and resurrection, I remembered an experience I had early in life where I encountered death. I'm a pastor's daughter, remember? We lived in Southwestern Minnesota for about eight years in a small farming town, surrounded by cornfields. It was the kind of town where the two big churches in town were the Lutherans and the Catholics. Of a town of about 4000, it seemed like maybe 1500 were Lutherans, members of our church, 1500 were Catholics, and the rest either didn't go or went to congregations that were too small to notice. At my young age, our church seemed like a huge cathedral, three floors in the education wing and a huge sanctuary. And of course, we lived right next door to it, in the parsonage.

Our dentist was a member of the congregation, and he had a son who was of junior high age. One day, a horrible tragedy struck their lives and touched all of us around them. Duck hunting was big in that area. Our dentist had taken his son out duck hunting with some other hunter friends. While in a boat, Bradley, the son, leapt up suddenly to take aim at a duck, and his father, who had also been taking aim at a duck right behind him, pulled his trigger. Our dentist accidentally shot his own son in the back of the head, killing him instantly.

Everyone was horrified about what had happened. It was as if a deep sadness settled over the whole town.

I remember the hearse delivering the coffin to our church the morning of the service. They set it up in the narthex, so that people entering the church for the funeral could also do the viewing on their way in. The funeral home personnel left after getting things ready. I wanted to see Bradley, so I went across

the lawn, up the front steps, opened one of the big front doors and stepped into the dim light of the narthex.

Bradley didn't look like Bradley. I had never touched someone who was dead so I reached out and touched him. He was cold and hard, not supple and warm. We all know what life feels like. There was no life there at all. Bradley was gone.

The women in our Luke text are thinking they'll see a dead body soon, too, the lifeless body of Jesus. They had probably done this before - possibly many times - prepared bodies for proper burial. It's what women did. They tended to births and deaths.

I'm sure these women had been shocked by the horrific events of Good Friday, ending with the death of Jesus. His body had been taken down from the cross just before the Sabbath began. A supporter of his, Joseph of Arimathea, had gotten permission to quickly wrap his body in a linen shroud and place him in an unused tomb. The women followers saw where he was laid. Because no work could be done on the Sabbath, they would have to wait until the following day (our Sunday) to do their anointing with perfumes and spices.

So in our text this morning, these women are on a mission! At the crack of dawn they arrive at the tomb. Imagine their confused state when they find the entrance stone rolled away and stepping inside - see no body where they had seen him laid on Friday. *"Wait...did we get the wrong tomb? This was the right one, right? Or did we get something messed up in all the chaos?"*

Then, out of nowhere, it seemed, two men in "gleaming, bright clothing" stood beside them. (CEB) Some say the women were awestruck, some say they were terrified. I think I would have fainted. The women bowed their faces down to the ground.

These angels(?), these other-worldly people had a question for the women. The Message version says it this way: *"Why are you looking for **the Living One** in a cemetery? He is not here, but raised up. Remember how he told you when you were still back in Galilee that he had to be handed over to sinners, be killed on a cross, and in three days rise up?"*

Da Jesus Book version says it this way: *"How come you wahines stay looking fo da guy dat stay alive, ova hea aroun da mahke guys? Jesus not hea; he wen come back alive! Rememba, he wen tell you guys dis wen he still stay wit you guys Galilee side. He wen say, 'I Da Guy Dass Fo Real. Dey gotta turn me ova to da bad guys. An dey goin kill me on top one cross. But day numba three, I goin come back alive!'"*

Then the women remembered! Den da wahines rememba wat Jesus wen say! They paired the words of Jesus with his actions! And suddenly hope and love and truth and beauty must have washed over their lives in new measure! There was the possibility of life again after death! Jesus had told that to Martha, right? "I'm the resurrection and the life," he had said. "He that believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live!" Death, our greatest enemy, will not have the final word! We can look at death as being a comma, not a period.

When a person believes in resurrection, they live differently. Their life gets washed with color. They enjoy the journey instead of focusing solely on the promised end. This doesn't mean they won't grieve or that they won't suffer on the journey. Jesus grieved and suffered. But people who believe in the resurrection realize that God has a purpose for them still being around! They become more and more

willing to share, to witness to the source of hope and love and peace and joy in their lives. They are able at some point to say, “The darkness that we’ve experienced hasn’t been able to put out the light!”

The women went back to where the eleven disciples were staying as well as other followers, and told them what had happened at the tomb. Even though some were slow to believe (in other words - they thought what the women shared was an idle tale) that didn’t matter. Everyone’s pace of coming to believe is different, unique. The important thing is that those women shared who they were, in the light of what Christ had done and what they had experienced.

Our Acts 10 text also demonstrates how people who believe in resurrection live differently.

Peter, the Jew, the former fisherman who had left all to follow Jesus, the guy with the big mouth, who boasted of his fidelity but ended up denying Jesus three times, who also repented and was selected by Jesus to be a leader of the church - we find this guy accepting the hospitality of Cornelius, a Gentile. Peter is going to stay in Cornelius’s home for a few days! That’s a big deal!

Here’s why it was a big deal. In God’s big-picture plan, blessing the family of the Jews was meant to spread out and end up blessing all the families of the earth.

But the Jews had twisted God’s blessing of them into a belief that God was favoring them. Over time they developed traditions that were adopted in order to keep them apart from non-Jewish (or Gentile) families. Racial pride and hatred of Gentiles grew, so much so that many of the Jews referred to the Gentiles as ‘dogs.’ Orthodox Jews would never enter the home of a Gentile, much less eat at a table with them or do business with them. Entrenched prejudice is what we’re dealing with here.

So what does God do? God gave Cornelius a vision first, and then Peter a vision also. Through the instructions given in the visions, which they each obeyed, God was able to bring them together, with Peter ending up in the home of a Gentile.

That’s where it became clear to Peter what God was up to. God’s ways are not our ways. God wants us to live - in the time we’re given - in community.

Peter said, “God plays no favorites! It makes no difference who you are or where you’re from—if you want God and are ready to do as he says, the door is open. The Message he sent to the children of Israel — that through Jesus Christ everything is being put together again — well, he’s doing it everywhere, among everyone.”

Then Peter went on to explain who Jesus was, how Jesus had lived, what had been done to Jesus - him being killed in Jerusalem, and what had happened after his death - that God had raised him from the dead and he had appeared to various witnesses. Now Peter could testify that in God’s big-picture plan, Jesus is destined to be the judge of the living and dead, and he is the means to forgiveness of sins and new life, new creation, new relationships. Cornelius and his people were filled with the Holy Spirit after hearing about Jesus, and were baptized.

People who believe in the resurrection live differently!

In our 1 Corinthians text, we see how strongly the Apostle Paul wanted the church in Corinth to hold on to believing in the resurrection. He wanted them to realize their own future fate was tied to Christ’s

resurrection. Evidently there were some going around saying there was no such thing as resurrection. Paul challenged such thinking. If people in that church had become Christians because they believed Jesus was alive, risen from the dead, they had to believe in resurrection. Paul said, "If corpses can't be raised, then Christ wasn't, because he was indeed dead. And if Christ wasn't raised, then all you're doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever." A life dull and colorless...

"But in fact, Christ was raised up, the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries." Believing in the resurrection means Christians can live with ultimate hope for the future, and it's a much wider and wilder future than they could ever imagine. It's bigger than one's own circle of family and friends. It's cosmic!

Finally, regarding our psalm for the day, I found it so interesting that because Psalm 118 tells the story of a deliverance and the resulting celebrations, it is used at Passover, reminding Jews of the Exodus and the return from exile.

But early Christians saw Jesus in it, too. As Paul Myhre's commentary says, "In Mark's Gospel, chapter 12, verse 10-11 (NIV), Jesus teaches the chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders about his identity, 'Haven't you read this passage of Scripture: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" The people of Jesus' time had difficulty accepting that the Messiah could be a carpenter's son from a backroad village of Nazareth.

It is relatively certain that the Psalm writer had no idea that what he wrote would inspire other associations 1,000 years later by Jesus, Peter, and the Gospel writers. Yet, his theology suggests an understanding of God as someone who can take the rejected and turn it into something that becomes important and vital. That which people would regard as worthless is regarded differently by the creator God who made the stones, and the created world, in the first place. The Psalmist is welcoming new horizons for thinking about the God who was, is, and is to come. There is a thickness to his words that transcend time and space. They serve as invitations to know and receive blessings from the one who is able to do so much more than they can imagine or hope to be accomplished.

For us who believe in the resurrection, who believe God acted decisively in Christ's death and resurrection, let's keep encouraging each other to live differently, listening to God's word, witnessing to the Good News, living in community - nurturing relationships, showing no favoritism, welcoming all who are hungry for God and who are willing to follow in his ways.

This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!
Amen!

