

“Resurrection: The Common Denominator”

Something happened on that first Easter morning that dramatically changed lives. What happened changed the course of history ... unleashed a power that proved truth is stronger than falsehood ... good is stronger than evil ... love is stronger than hatred ... and life ... life is stronger than death. What happened was Resurrection! And no matter how resurrection is explained, the fact remains something happened to change the world forever. I cannot believe that the disciples created a myth, and then laid down their lives for a lie! I cannot believe a dedicated Roman soldier in charged of persecuting Christians did a complete about face, and became a great Apostle giving his own life for something earlier he killed other people for! Something happened that empowered individuals to change, and in the process enabled them to change the world. What happened was Resurrection.

I cannot believe that a myth brought Jew and Gentile ... owner and slave ... male and female together ... that a myth created equality unmatched by any movement in human history. The reality of resurrection does not lie in scientific proof or clever answers to question “how did Jesus do it?” The reality of resurrection is borne out in the number of lives changed and their responsive actions. There was such authenticity to the witness of the apostles about the resurrection that people’s lives radically changed practically over night. It wasn’t so much what people heard, but what they saw. People saw the courage of the disciples’ witness. They saw their lives suddenly change. Resurrection happened and it created an intense sense of responsibility for one another.

Resurrection awoke among believers a real desire to share all they had. This sharing was not the result of legislation; it was utterly spontaneous. No church law compelled the people to share their possessions, or to give a certain amount of their wealth. People’s hearts were transformed by the Resurrection, and they gave out of compassion. Resurrection opened people’s eyes and they looked beyond themselves and saw each other. They saw real human need and their faith led them to meet those needs. The first Christians gave because they no longer judged their lives by the amount of wealth and goods they accumulated. They held all things in common as a witness to what they believed to be true. Resurrection happened and it created a partnership with Christ. Discipleship ... following Jesus ... meant that individual property was own by all. Their giving was not considered charity, but genuine human spontaneous sharing. Resurrection happened ... and love for one another took precedent over the enjoyment of material goods and personal possessions.

There is an ancient story that illustrates this thought quite well. In his travels, a monk once found a precious stone and kept it. One day he met another traveler, and when the monk opened his bag to share his provisions, the traveler saw the jewel and asked the monk to give it to him. The monk did so readily. The traveler departed, overjoyed with the unexpected gift of the precious stone that was enough to give him wealth and security for the rest of his life. However, a few days later he came back in search of the monk. And when he found him, he gave the monk back the precious stone. He said to the monk: “Now please give me something much more precious than this stone, valuable as it is. Give me that which enabled you to give it to me!”

Resurrection: the power which broke the bonds of death on Easter, shattered the divisions of speech at Pentecost, and empowered one who was lame ... now Resurrection releases that tight grip on private property. The first believers in Christ were united in heart and soul. Everything they owned, they counted as God’s, and as such, they considered everything they possessed as a blessing from God ... blessings that equipped them to share among themselves. Their sharing brought them closer together, and in turn created community.

Resurrection created a community of faith ... a family of believers. When it came to believing in Christ these first believers faced similar problems ... they faced great persecution by the Romans ... they were ostracized by family and friends ... they were labeled “Christians” which at that time was a derogatory term. All these problems motivated them to act in responsible ways toward one another. They needed one another, in order to face the great challenges of life; they needed each other’s support, in order cope with the cruelty of this world. When they were individually weak, they were able to draw strength from the community of faith. The whole is stronger than its individual parts. Resurrection moved people out from their individual self to a greater sense of community. Out of

the human predicament, Resurrection created what is known as a “the common good.” Resurrection made people value community more than themselves. These first believers placed the needs of the community first before their personal needs. Christ bonded them together, these early bands of brothers and sisters. Resurrection was the glue that kept these first believers together.

Now contrast that first Easter with today. People hunger for community! With the family unit scattered or in disarray, people need the support of other people ... people need a place where they have a sense of belonging ... a place of comfort and encouragement for themselves and their children. Against the world, as individual, we don't stand a chance. But together, in community and in particular a Christian community, we have the assurance we are not alone, and that we are not crazy. We have the prayers of the faith community. We have the security and comfort of hearing God's Word. Prayer and Gospel impart God's Spirit and that spirit unlocks the fetters of fear and guilt ... releases us to face the world unafraid. Resurrection frees us! We are freed by grace to live under grace. In this world, we are all in the same boat! We need to pull together. We need to pull for each other.

An ancient rabbi, reflecting upon the way in which the sin of anyone is everyone's problem, compared his congregation with the passengers in a boat at sea. One passenger begins to drill a hole under his own seat. When the others object, he retorts that it is none of their business. After all, he is drilling under his own seat and not under theirs. He feels that he can do as he pleases with what is his own. And they reply that it is their business, for the water which pours in through his hole will flood the boat and they will all suffer for it.

I want you to remember this story and take it to heart, because it is an accurate commentary on our society today. People do what they please without seeing beyond their own skin. They don't consider the bigger picture. They have no clue that the consequences of their actions affect numerous people, as well as the world in general. Our individual choices and behavior create a ripple affect. It's like dropping a rock into the center of a pond. Long after we do that, the ripples keep spreading out farther and farther, touching all sides of the pond. Our individual actions affect more people than we know. When we act irresponsible, we are drilling a hole not only under our own seat, but we may be doing something that has far reaching consequences to dozens of other lives. Not to see beyond our own skin ... not to take other people's feelings or lives into account is selfish and destructive.

Stop thinking of your self! Start looking at your life in a much bigger context. You will then find truer happiness. Our lesson from Acts makes this very clear. The Greek verb for “giving” meant to give back in the sense of paying a debt or rendering an account. The implication is that in receiving grace from God, we contract a debt to God that is paid by the witness of our life. Because God loves us, in spite of our foolish selves, we in turn respond to such love by sharing with others what we have. Our possessions are then simply resources that enable us to bear witness to what God has done for us.

In Protestant Churches the Cross is bare. There is no image of Jesus hanging on the cross, no crucifix, because we are not Good Friday people. Jesus is not there. He has gone before us to Galilee and we are to meet him in the “Galilees” of our life. We are Easter people. We believe Christ is risen. The resurrection is the foundation of what we believe. The power to transform us is still the same power today as it was 2,000 years ago. We need to remember that fact. We need to focus on the generous gift of God's grace. We need to pray to God for our release from the idol of our possessions. We need to pray to God that our outlook and attitude is one that says: “My life is blessed in that I never needed anything until I had it.”

Somehow, we need to teach our children, as well as remind ourselves that every right implies a responsibility ... every opportunity, an obligation ... every possession, a duty. With our possessions comes the call to recognize their value in relationship to others' needs. We need to let Resurrection happen in our life, because Resurrection is the right stuff. Resurrection frees us from this world, and prepares us for the next. Resurrection brings us into a right relationship with God. Resurrection is who we are as a people of faith. Resurrection is who we are as a church. Resurrection is the common denominator. What is yours is mine; what is mine is yours; and what is ours is God's!!!