



## God's Latest Resurrection

*A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Claire Nevin-Field  
The Feast of the Resurrection~April 1, 2018*

### Acts 10:34-43

Peter began to speak to Cornelius and the other Gentiles: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

### Psalm 118:14-17, 22-24

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| 14 The Lord is my strength and my song, *<br>and he has become my salvation.  | and declare the works of the Lord.   |
| 15 There is a sound of exultation and victory *<br>in the tents of the righteous:   | 22 The same stone which the builders rejected *<br>has become the chief cornerstone. |
| 16 "The right hand of the Lord has triumphed! *<br>the right hand of the Lord is exalted!<br>the right hand of the Lord has triumphed!" | 23 This is the Lord's doing, *<br>and it is marvelous in our eyes.                   |
| 17 I shall not die, but live, *   | 24 On this day the Lord has acted;<br>we will rejoice and be glad in it.             |

### I Corinthians 15:1-11

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain. For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

### Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he

is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. [And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.]

Easter is tied to the spring equinox because it is tied to Passover, but without that tie it would still have been a brilliant idea. Spring (assuming it ever shows up to stay) has a way of making us feel alive—as everything around us bursts back into life—green shoots coming up through the soil, trees in full bloom, birds excitedly chirping and nesting. It is as if we, like the trees, have sap that rises towards the sun as it becomes brighter and hangs in the sky longer. It is as if our bodies inherently know something our minds have not quite cottoned onto yet—instinctively know resurrection, new life. Instinctively know that resurrection has a physical dimension that we sophisticated 21st century believers are quick to question or disbelieve.

But from the very beginning of the church, early Christians spoke of the resurrection of the body. This was partly about the resurrection of Jesus—the fact that they had seen, touched, spoken and eaten with him after he was raised from the dead. It was also about their belief that God meant to raise their own flesh too. They lived in the certainty that they would be raised from the dead—bodily raised—at the last trumpet. The God who had made their bodies and declared them to be good, would not have a sudden change of heart. Whatever happened after death, wherever they went with God, they were sure they were going bodily. This became orthodox Christian belief.

But in the hundreds, thousands of years since then, that belief, this bold hope, has become harder to sustain. We say it every Sunday in the Nicene Creed, but if you ask most Christians what they believe about life after life, they will talk not about a physical body but about a spiritual body—one that is vastly superior to the fleshy model. This side of the grave flesh is sluggish, tiresome, and prone to getting injured. St. Paul tends to equate flesh with sin—it is always dragging us in the wrong direction, making us do all the things we don't want to do and none of the things we want to do. I understand all of this—but I do wonder what this aversion to flesh says about, does to, our idea of incarnation—the word that means “enfleshed”—both Jesus' incarnation and our own.

Most of us were taught that incarnation is something that happened once—in Jesus. God in a move that is somewhat irrational and baffling, decided to become human and was incarnate (capital I) in Jesus. Jesus was Word Made Flesh and our job is to believe that and persuade others of its truth. The fate of our own flesh depends on our belief in this doctrine.

The older I get, though, the less enamored I am with doctrine. Though it seems that many Western Christians are obsessed with believing the “right” things, “saying the right formula”, I am not so sure God cares what we say—cares if we have all our doctrines right. And I am quite sure God cares a lot about what we do and how we live. And so I have come to think that resurrection is less doctrine than practice. I do believe that Jesus was physically raised from the dead, but I am persuaded that one of the points of his life, death, and resurrection was not that it was a one and done thing, God showing off, but to open a way to, to show how anyone who was, is willing, how God's word could become incarnate in their own lives too. Jesus spent very little time talking about what people believed and a whole lot of time talking about how we live, what we do: “follow me and I will make you fish for people”, “Give to everyone who begs from you”, “Go and do likewise”. These aren't intellectual pursuits to which we can attest or not, these are embodied, fleshy actions. Jesus taught his followers to take other peoples bodies as seriously as they took their own, to trust that birds, lilies, stars, wheat, vines, and sheep had a lot to teach us about the Kingdom of God. He taught his followers to see God in the world, to see God all around them, just as he did. To see God in the way creation worked as if he was saying we could learn about God and God's kingdom by attending to the physical realities of earth, of bodies.

Practicing resurrection, practicing incarnation, is a teaching as old as the Gospels. Those who were here on Thursday heard of Jesus washing feet and sharing bread and wine with his friends. On his very last night on earth he didn't give them a long list of things to think about, doctrines to believe, he gave them specific things to do—ways of being in their bodies together—ways that would keep on teaching them what they needed to know—teaching them what love looks like when it walks around on 2 feet-long after he was gone from their sight.

He knew that once he was gone from the face of the earth, God's word would go on, but it would be in need of some new flesh. In order to carry on in his way the disciples would need something they could bump into on a regular basis, that would knock the rough edges off them and rough up the smooth places. Something so concrete, so present that they could not confine it to the realm of intellect, but would need to wear it—walk around in it—live it. He gave them bread and wine—to chew, to slurp—to share and enjoy. He gave them dirty, crusty feet that they could touch and care for—use to enter one another's lives.

I am relieved, in a sense, that this year, this year in which many of us are experiencing fear, deep anxiety for the world that seems much less safe, much less certain than ever before in our lives a year in which we worry about the poor, the marginalized, the weak, the black, the brown, Jews, Muslims—basically any and all who are not white and hetero—I am relieved that into this broken, needy world, we have Mark's telling of the Jesus story. Mark, from

his opening line: the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”, to his last line; “and they fled in fear and told no one” is pushing us to embody Christ. He is telling us that Jesus life, death, and resurrection is not the ending of any story, Jesus or ours, but that it is only and always the beginning, it is an invitation to a new way of life-life very much in this world, in flesh. Mark fashions it as a divine game of “tag you’re it” and we are “it”. Mark pushes us to take the Word Made Flesh into our flesh and go, and tell everyone we meet that we have seen the Risen Christ and further that now we are to be his hands, his feet, his heart in this broken, hurting, breathtakingly beautiful, God inhabited world. Mark’s telling of the story assures us that it is OK to be afraid as we pick up and take over where Christ left off. Fear is an inherent part of the Gospel story. But the empty tomb tells us that darkness, fear, anxiety, hatred, even death, do not have the last word. That God has another ace up the holy sleeve, and in partnership with the Holy Spirit, it is us. You and me.

You see, for all our failure to honor them, our own and others, our bodies were and are God’s best way of getting to us, of getting to the world. To walk the way of resurrection, to practice incarnation, is to walk the way of life God opened for us in Jesus Christ, by showing us how to embody our own flesh faithfully, reverently, and fully-just as he did. When through the miracle of incarnation and resurrection, we are able to follow the leader, to follow God, for even a minute, then we too become God’s Easter people, the latest in a long line of bodily resurrections of God’s Word Made Flesh.

He is Risen. We are Risen. Alleluia!

\*This sermon owes a debt to Barbara Brown Taylor whose thoughts greatly influenced it.