

April 11, 2010
Echo Hill Presbyterian Church

Acts 5:27-32
2nd Sunday of Easter

Peter's Resurrection Experience

Text

Before we come to our text let me make some comments to help put this text into context for us.

Easter morning finds Jesus' disciples together in some undisclosed location in Jerusalem. The women go to the tomb and return with the Easter message – that Jesus is no longer dead but has risen – he is alive. Jesus appears to his disciples (followers) at different times and in different ways – offering proof of his resurrection, opening their minds to the truth (revealed in scripture) of who he is, and commissioning them to be witnesses – to share the truth of his life, his death and his victory over death – calling people for all nations to believe and to receive the life that they have been given in Christ.

Following Jesus' ascension into heaven – these disciples – who have seemed to be tentative about this whole Jesus thing since his arrest and crucifixion and who are still clearing cobwebs from their heads about this whole resurrection thing – have the Holy Spirit descend upon them – and they go from the place they have been gathering and begin to proclaim the message of Jesus' life death and resurrection.

This morning's text comes to us kind of smack dab out of the middle of a larger story. The apostles have not only been teaching about Jesus – proclaiming him as the messiah – the one who has come to save his people – but they have been healing the sick – the lame are walking –

the blind are seeing - the demon possessed are being made whole. – The religious leaders are getting more and more nervous – worried about an uprising by the people – worried about losing their own authority and power within the church.

These religious leaders have already arrested Peter and John once. After a hearing they released the two of them forbidding them not to ‘speak or preach in Jesus name’ any longer. Courageously – Peter and John as well as the other apostles continue to tell the story of Jesus which is why they find themselves arrested again – and why they find themselves standing in front of the council of the religious leaders this morning.

Let us pray. Scripture Reading **Acts 5:27-32**

Sermon

I want to acknowledge some things this morning.

I want to acknowledge so things that I know and you know – things that have been articulated to the leadership in the Cultural Assessment Summary Document that was recently completed by Jim Healy – the consultant who is helping us in a process of understanding where we are and where we are headed.

I want to acknowledge that as a community of faith – we are not as clear about where we are going as maybe we should be. (We are working on that.)

I want to acknowledge that the structures, the traditions, and ways of doing things that have guided us in the past are in disarray.

I want to acknowledge that the work of bringing to congregations together – the leaving behind – and the making new – has been more difficult than any of us imagined.

I want to acknowledge that many of us don't know what is going on a lot of the times, or what exactly we are to be doing, or how we might fit in the big picture – what our place is in this community of faith.

I want to acknowledge that there is disagreement about the values we should hold as a community of faith.

I want to acknowledge that there is uncertainty and anxiousness about the future and there is uncertainty and anxiousness about the financial future.

I want to acknowledge that this has been often a confusing, disorienting, and sometimes overwhelming season of change.

I want to acknowledge – I want to say these things out loud – so that we all can hear them.

“But let us be honest,” I said to you on that Sunday we dedicated this facility. *“Let us be honest,”* I said to you referring to the empty places that must precede the ‘new thing’ that God

was doing in our midst. *“Let us be honest – this empty space – this void – is a bit unsettling. – It is place of uncertainty and of confusion – of anxiousness.– I might even say – that at times it is a place of fearfulness.”*

This unsettling – confusing – anxious – fearful place that we might find ourselves today – is not without precedence. It is a part of the story of faith that we share with men and women throughout the ages.

This morning let us consider for a moment – Peter – one of Jesus’ disciples – one of his apostles’. Peter lives in the Galilee at Capernaum in the northern part of Israel. We could define him as a fisherman, a husband, and a Jew. Jesus comes along and says ‘come and follow me’ – and Peter does. Now Peter doesn’t know exactly what following will mean – if will often leave him wondering – just who is this guy and what the heck is he talking about. The kingdom of God? The Son of Man?

Peter will leave something he knows – being a fisherman – for something he doesn’t know – being a student – a disciple. He will be asked to do things that he is uncomfortable doing – being sent out to heal and to proclaim the kingdom.

Peter will get it right sometimes – a few steps out on a stormy sea – saying the Jesus is the Messiah – the one who saves.

And he will get it wrong – sinking into that same stormy sea – denying that he even knows Jesus.

Peter will disown Jesus when Jesus is arrested, tried and crucified – and Peter will go to the tomb and he will encounter the resurrected Jesus.

As we listen during this season of Easter to the resurrection stories – the stories told by women and by men who encounter the risen Christ either by his presence or his absence – we hear words like ‘...they were perplexed’ – ‘...they were terrified’, ‘...they were amazed’ – ‘astounded’ – ‘startled’ – ‘frightened’ – ‘disbelieving’ and ‘wondering’... And this is true too, I think, for Peter.

Resurrection – Jesus’ resurrection – what it means – that God has defeated death – and all that seeks to rob us of the life that he has created as good. Resurrection – Jesus’ resurrection and what it means isn’t some kind of magic wand that God waves over the people and institutions and tribes and nations making everything hunky dory. It’s not like one of those cartoons where someone sprinkles something in the stream and suddenly grass is growing and flowers are blooming and trees are budding and animals are dancing – ‘zippitty do da – zippitty day’.

Instead Jesus resurrection will cause tension and upheaval – it will undermine structures and customs and traditions and ways of being church. It will cause confusion.

This is true for Peter and those first disciples – the men and women who have followed Jesus and it is true for us.

Let us take heart this morning – in the midst of our journey(s) – our following of this Jesus. – Let us take heart – in the midst of anxious times – confusion – uncertainty. Let us take heart for if we see nothing else this morning – let us see how Peter’s encounter with the risen Christ and his baptism by the Holy Spirit – galvanizes Peter’s faith.

In our text this morning we see a Peter who is now willing to stand against all who seek to keep things the way they were – and to speak in boldness of the world of life.

Peter’s resurrection experience has given him courage in the midst of the confusion.

Episcopal Bishop Jim Kelsey wrote shortly before his untimely death in 2007:

"This is something I have found to be true without exception: that when we, any of us, focus on things in our lives that are passing away, we get scared, we get anxious, we get depressed, we lose hope; and when we focus on things that are being birthed and are coming newly into creation, we get excited, we get imaginative, we get optimistic, we feel drawn closer to one another, we feel as if we have meaning and purpose in this life, and we have joy. . . we are given change as an ingredient in life. We can be frightened and anxious and resistant to it or we can embrace it as a tool to transform us." -- Episcopal Bishop - Jim Kelsey (1952-2007)ⁱ

Isn't this really about what it means to be people who have embraced and are embraced by the gift of resurrection – isn't it about having the courage to stand against those things that those things that are passing away – that are dying. And isn't it equally about us having the courage to stand – even in the midst of the anxiety and confusion of change – to say that we are people who are called to life – to those things that bring life and those things that give life.

Ending

In Jesus' resurrection we see the power of God defeat those things that attempt to steal life from us – not just eternal life – but here and today life.

If Jesus' resurrection gives us cause to foolishly celebrate life – when we are surrounded by so much death (this is what I was saying last week) – then it also gives us the courage to face death and those things that attempt to steal from us the fullness of life – life that is good – life that is meaningful - life that is joyful.

In the name of the Father...

¹ Kelsey, Jim, quoted in an online article from Alban Institute 4/5/10 entitled The Ministry of the Baptized by Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook and Fredrica Harris Thompsett.