

ACHIEVING CONTEMPORARY RESURRECTION

Sermon, Easter Sunday 4/1/18, Mark 16: 1-8, The Rev. John Harper

**IN THE PAST, I'VE USUALLY RESISTED PREACHING ON
EASTER OR CHRISTMAS. MY BELIEF WAS THAT
EVERYTHING THAT COULD POSSIBLY BE SAID HAD
ALREADY BEEN SAID MANY TIMES OVER. THESE ARE,
AFTER ALL, STORIES DESCRIBING THE MOST IMPORTANT
EVENTS OF OUR FAITH, NOT THE KIND OF STORIES YOU
CAN JUMP INTO AND EMERGE WITH MANY DIFFERENT
MEANINGS AND NEW MESSAGES.**

**BUT SHORTLY AFTER I WAS ASSIGNED TO EASTER
SUNDAY, I REALIZED THAT THIS WAS ONLY THE SECOND
TIME IN MY LONG LIFETIME WHEN EASTER AND APRIL
FOOLS DAY FELL ON THE SAME DAY. MY IMAGINATION
SHOT RIGHT INTO SPACE. PERHAPS I SHOULD DELVE INTO
SOME OF THE THEOLOGY OF MY FAVORITE CARTOON
SHOW, SOUTH PARK, WHICH CLEARLY EXPLAINS THE
CONNECTION BETWEEN THE RESURRECTION, DYED EGGS,
AND THE EASTER BUNNY.**

NEXT I THOUGHT PERHAPS THE TIME HAD FINALLY COME

**TO LAY OUT MY CASE FOR WHY ONLY WOMEN SHOULD BE
ORDAINED MINISTERS. IT'S ALL THERE IN THE STORY OF
HOLY WEEK AND EASTER: MEN ASLEEP WHEN JESUS
NEEDED THEM MOST; MEN BETRAYING; MEN DENYING
THEY KNEW JESUS; MEN IN HIDING, CONCERNED ONLY FOR
THEIR OWN FATES. WOMEN FOLLOWING JESUS THROUGH
HIS ARREST, TRIAL, AND SENTENCING; WOMEN
FAITHFULLY NEAR HIM AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS;
WOMEN COMING TO THE TOMB ON THE 3RD DAY TO ANOINT
JESUS' BODY; AND FINALLY, WOMEN CHOSEN BY GOD TO
SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS THAT CHRIST WAS RISEN.**

2.

**BUT I HAD TO REJECT THAT THEME IN THE END. IT'S FAR
TOO REAL AND NOT AN APRIL FOOL JOKE AT ALL. FINALLY
MY MATURE SELF TOOK OVER, AND I STARTED THINKING
ABOUT RESURRECTION, IN ITS BROADEST MEANING AND
FULLEST DIMENSIONS.**

**I THINK IT'S FAIR TO SAY THAT THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN
NO CHRISTIAN RELIGION IF THE RESURRECTION HAD NOT
TAKEN PLACE. JESUS WOULD HAVE GONE DOWN IN THE
BIBLE AND THE HISTORY BOOKS AS YET ANOTHER MAJOR**

**PROPHET WHO WAS DESTROYED BY SPEAKING THE TRUTH
IN A WAY WHICH THREATENED THOSE IN POWER, BOTH
IN RELIGION AND IN GOVERNMENT. BUT THE WORDS
“CHRIST HAS DIED, CHRIST IS RISEN, CHRIST WILL COME
AGAIN”, FORM THE CENTRAL BELIEFS OF OUR FAITH.**

**WHEN WE USE THE WORD RESURRECTION, WE USUALLY
MEAN THE RISING OF CHRIST, OR ANY PERSON, FROM THE
DEAD. BUT THERE ARE OTHER PRIMARY MEANINGS LESS
OFTEN APPLIED. ONE DEFINITION MAKES IT A SYNONYM
FOR RESURGENCE OR REVIVAL. AND ANOTHER DEFINITION
IS A SPIRITUALIZATION OF THOUGHT, A MATERIAL BELIEF
THAT YIELDS TO SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING.**

**IN SEASONS SUCH AS LENT AND ADVENT, WE HAVE A FAIR
AMOUNT OF GUIDANCE AS TO WHAT OUR RESPONSIBILITIES
AS CHRISTIANS SHOULD BE. BUT WHAT ABOUT EASTER?
SURE, WE CAN REJOICE AND SHOUT ALLELUIAS, BUT
SHOULDN'T WE BE CHALLENGING OURSELVES TO DO MORE
THAN THAT?**

OUR COLLECT FOR THIS MORNING REMINDS US THAT THE

**OPEN GOSPEL ENDS WHERE EASTER FAITH BEGINS. WE ARE
ASKED TO TAKE OUR FEAR AND DISBELIEF, AND ALLOW THE
RISEN SON OF GOD TO TAKE US INTO A NEW WORLD. 4.
THAT'S A GREAT SET OF MARCHING ORDERS FOR OUR
ENTRY INTO THE EASTER SEASON.**

**ALL DAY LAST SATURDAY, I WAS TRAPPED IN MY HOUSE
BY THE SNOWSTORM; AND I FOUND MYSELF WATCHING
HOUR AFTER HOUR OF MARCH FOR OUR LIVES EVENTS.
AND I CONSTANTLY MARVELED AT THE SPIRIT, THE
MATURITY, THE ARTICULATE QUALITIES, AND THE
DEDICATION TO A CAUSE OF THOSE TEENAGE SPEAKERS.
"THEY RAISED UP A WHOLE GENERATION FROM ITS
LETHARGY AND INDIFFERENCE," I THOUGHT. THIS IS
TRULY A MOMENTS OF RESURRECTION, OF REVIVAL AND
RESURGENCE OF A SPIRIT WHICH HAS BEEN DEAD SINCE
THE WANING YEARS OF THE VIET-NAM WAR.**

**TODAY WE LIVE IN A BADLY BROKEN AND DIVIDED
SOCIETY IN AN EVEN MORE BADLY BROKEN WORLD. I
THINK OUR CHALLENGE IS TO WORK TOWARD A NEW KIND
OF RESURRECTION . AND I'D LIKE TO SUGGEST SOME AREAS**

IN WHICH THIS SEEMS BOTH RELEVANT AND NECESSARY.

**FIRST, IT SEEMS TO ME THAT WE NEED TO WORK TOWARD
5.
A RESURRECTION OF CIVIL DISCOURSE. OUR NATION, AND
OUR RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS, HAVE BECOME SO
POLARIZED THAT WE AUTOMATICALLY THROW BOMBS AT
EACH OTHER INSTEAD OF CALMLY SEEKING A MIDDLE
GROUND. WHAT USED TO BE CALLED THE OPPOSITION IS
NOW LABELED AS THE ENEMY.**

**WE LIVE IN A TECHNOLOGY-HEAVY AGE, WHERE IT'S
EASY TO VILLIFY AN OPINION WHICH DIFFERS FROM OUR
OWN ---- THROUGH TEXT MESSAGES AND TWEETS, AND ON
FACEBOOK AND OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS. I HAVE
A LOCAL FRIEND WHOSE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL VIEWS
ARE ABOUT 180 DEGREES FROM MINE. SEVERAL YEARS AGO,
WE AGREED TO STOP THE PUBLIC NAME-CALLING, AND
MAKE A POINT OF HAVING DINNER TOGETHER FROM TIME
TO TIME. WE EVEN WENT TO A POLITICAL LECTURE
TOGETHER. AND ALTHOUGH NO POSITIONS HAVE CHANGED
MUCH FOR EITHER OF US, WE'VE GAINED A HEALTHY**

RESPECT FOR THE ORIGINS AND REASONS FOR EACH OTHER'S OPINIONS, AND THE PUBLIC RHETORIC HAS BEEN TONED DOWN APPRECIABLY.

6.

THE NEXT AREA OF POSSIBLE RESURRECTION WHICH SEEMS IMPORTANT, IF NOT CRITICAL, HAS TO DO WITH EMBRACING THE MESSAGES AND THE MANDATES OF THE GOSPELS. ALL TOO OFTEN, WE TAKE OUR STANCES ON POLITICAL ISSUES AND CALL THEM CHRISTIAN, EVEN THOUGH THEY MAY BE TOTALLY AT ODDS WITH THE MESSAGES OF THE GOSPELS, OR WERE NEVER EVEN MENTIONED IN THE BIBLE.

WORKING TOWARD THIS RESURRECTION BEGINS WITH A SHARP FOCUS ON THE TWO GREAT COMMANDMENTS: LOVE GOD, AND LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. AND WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT OUR NEIGHBOR IS EVERYONE IN THIS INTERDEPENDENT WORLD ---- NEIGHBORS OF EVERY COLOR AND ETHNICITY, EVERY FAITH TRADITION, EVERY POLITICAL STANCE, AND EVERY ORIENTATION.

WE NEED TO PAY CLOSER ATTENTION TO THE GOSPEL MANDATES TO CARE FOR THE SICK, THE POOR, THE WIDOW

AND THE ORPHAN, THE HOMELESS AND THE HUNGRY.

**THAT OBSERVATION LEADS US INTO RECOGNIZING THE
NEED FOR A RESURRECTION OF COMPASSION.**

7.

**OUR SOCIETY TODAY INCREASINGLY PRIZES WEALTH,
SUCCESS AT ANY PRICE, AND REWARDING ONESSELF FOR
ACHIEVEMENTS. WE HEAR THAT PEOPLE ARE POOR
BECAUSE THEY'RE LAZY, THAT PEOPLE ARE SICK BECAUSE
THEY DON'T TAKE PROPER CARE OF THEMSELVES, THAT
PEOPLE ARE HUNGRY BECAUSE THEY DON'T BUDGET THEIR
MONEY PROPERLY. OUR TAX STRUCTURES MORE AND MORE
FAVOR THE SUPER-RICH, AT THE COST OF CUTTING
BENEFITS AND PROGRAMS FOR EDUCATION, MEDICAL CARE,
MENTAL HEALTH, AND EVEN BASIC FOOD NEEDS.**

**ALONG WITH THIS, WE ARE SEEING A RADICAL INCREASE
IN RACISM, BOTH IN TERMS OF HATE CRIMES AND OF
PUBLIC POLICY. IMMIGRANTS, BOTH LEGAL AND NOT, LIVE
IN FEAR EVERY DAY.**

**OUR ACTIVISM COULD BRING ABOUT MAJOR CHANGE IN
MANY OF THESE AREAS, TO THE POINT OF A NATIONAL**

**RESURRECTION OF COMPASSION. IT MIGHT LOOK
HOPELESS AND INSURMOUNTABLE TO EACH OF US AS
INDIVIDUALS. BUT I LOOK BACK SEVERAL DECADES TO THE**

**8.
GREAT ANTHROPOLOGIST MARGARET MEAD, WHO TOLD
US: (QUOTE) NEVER BELIEVE THAT A FEW CARING PEOPLE
CAN'T CHANGE THE WORLD. FOR INDEED, THAT'S ALL WHO
EVER HAVE CHANGED IT."**

**IN TODAY'S GOSPEL FROM MARK, THE TWO MARYS AND
SALOME COME TO JESUS' TOMB AFTER SUNRISE. THEY
FIND THE STONE ROLLED AWAY AND THE TOMB EMPTY.
THEY ARE TOLD THAT JESUS IS RISEN, AND TO GO OUT
AND SPREAD THE WORD. THAT WAS A MOMENT THAT
CHANGED THE WORLD FOREVER, AND IT IS WHAT BRINGS
US HERE TODAY IN A SPIRIT OF HOPE AND OF JOY.**

**SO LET'S CELEBRATE THE DAY, WITH SHOUTS OF
ALLELUIA, WITH SONGS AND PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING,
WITH FAMILY GATHERINGS AND SPECIAL MEALS. BUT
TOMORROW, AND THROUGH THE SEASON OF EASTER, LET'S
DO WHAT WE CAN TO BRING ABOUT A NEW SPIRIT OF**

RESURRECTION IN THE SOCIETY AROUND US.

**IT MAY BE AS SIMPLE AS FACE-TO-FACE CONVERSATIONS
WITH PEOPLE WITH WHOM WE DISAGREE. IT MIGHT BE**

9.

**CONTACTING PUBLIC OFFICIALS ON MATTERS OF
PRIORITIES IN HUMAN NEEDS. OR LISTENING TO THE
STORIES OF IMMIGRANT FAMILIES AROUND US AND
OFFERING ASSISTANCE. WE CAN AND MUST KEEP THE
SPIRIT OF RESURRECTION INTACT IN OUR HEARTS.**

**“CHRIST IS ALIVE, HIS SPIRIT BURNS,
THROUGH THIS AND EVERY FUTURE AGE,
TILL ALL CREATION LIVES AND LEARNS
HIS JOY, HIS JUSTICE, LOVE, AND PRAISE.”**

AMEN