

Roslyn. April 16, 2017. The Resurrection of Our Lord

Grace and peace to you, community at Living Word, and mercy in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, God's risen conquering Son!

One of my favorite passages from Scripture comes from St. Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth—"Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." That passage goes right to the heart of Christianity. Christ has conquered death, and having been buried with him by baptism into death, we too are made more than conquerors just as Jesus, God's conquering Son, was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. This is the Easter promise, and the heart of the Christian gospel. Death has been swallowed up in victory.

But the question for us today is whether it all really matters. Belief in Christ's Resurrection from the dead is the central sign or marker of Christianity, yet if we no longer really believe—if we even did believe—then what does it really matter? And it can be hard in our world, especially today, to believe that death has lost its sting. I need not list all the depressing, dejecting events unfolding around the world that would make it appear that the Devil is winning the war. Or in our own lives—each of us faces our own personal struggles, yet we hold fast to the idea that Christ has given us the victory over all the death-dealing powers around us and not only gives us life, but gives us abundant life. Sometimes the promise of Resurrection is difficult to believe to the point of impossibility.

So what are we to do? What are to say? Has the Resurrection lost its umph? Has Christianity been discredited? Is our faith relevant? These are valuable, important questions, and ones that people are asking themselves—perhaps even you are asking yourself these very questions.

Throughout the gospel of John, Jesus performs signs, a total of seven in all. These signs are meant to strengthen the belief of his disciples and those around Jesus that he indeed is the Son of God whom the Father has sent into the world to redeem the world from sin. But it is this sin that got in the way of people believing this radical good news—the good news that God cares enough about us to reach out, to bend down, to humble himself and free a world that seems beyond redemption. How could be this be? The signs were all around them, yet they simply could not believe it.

Each of the seven signs Jesus performs in John's gospel point to the greatest sign—the sign of God's love for us. Each of the seven signs Jesus performs tells us something about what that love means for us. But most importantly, each of the seven signs Jesus performs tells us something about the greatest thing God does in John's gospel—raising Jesus from the dead. God's love is powerful enough that not even death can confine it! God's love transcends even the shackles of the grave. God raises Jesus from the dead not merely to demonstrate his power and might, but rather to open our eyes of sinful disbelief so that we once and for all truly know that God loves us and will undo even the bonds of death to share life with us.

The world and its cares surround us. Have no doubt about that. But the signs of God's marvelous love also surround us, if we step back and actually take a moment to look, to see, to believe. Like the women who come to the tomb and find it empty in Matthew's gospel, we too are astounded by the message that death no longer is the victor. What do you mean? But step back. Look around. See. Believe. God is doing marvelous things even now. Only sometimes these things are extraordinary in their ordinariness.

A daughter born to overjoyed parents, after years of trying...or a letter from a longtime friend, thinking of you? Perhaps reconciliation between estranged family members? Do you see the marvelous thing God is doing in children who teach us what love, compassion, acceptance, generosity, and patience look like? What about words of comfort and compassion in the face of a friend or loved one who has died? What about in a community of faith, such as Living Word, that makes a public profession to welcome all people, regardless of race, gender, occupation, sexual orientation, education, culture, or political affiliation—especially in times such as these in our world where walls of division and hatred seem to tower over us mightily and dauntingly?

God is alive in and through us, we who are Christ to the world. We who are ordinary, called to do the extraordinary. Resurrection is not merely a tenet of doctrine, but it is the primary and chief sign of our discipleship in Christ. We live it out in our daily lives when we go against the culture of this world and refuse to get caught up in negativity. We walk in newness of life when we see how God is at work, even in the mundanity of our daily lives. Christ has opened to us a way of seeing our promised Resurrection even here and even now. Heaven is not something only for eternity, but rather something we are blessed to live out today and every day—not only for us, but for our family, friends, neighbors, and even strangers.

So, does the Resurrection mean anything today? What do the signs say? Are there signs of life about us, even in the face of death? When we see those things, when we see how God has called us to be Christ to the world so desperately in need of love, kindness, and compassion, then we see God's marvelous works, then we see the signs of the Resurrection promise taking on flesh in our lives. Yes—Christ's Resurrection means something today. It means everything. The world desperately needs it, and we are blessed to share it.

May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

In Christ,

Pr. Daniel