

April 7, 2024 – Acts 4:32-35 & John 20:19-31

“The resurrection changes all our expectations.” That phrase should sound familiar to you. It was pretty much the central theme of my sermon last Sunday for Easter and something I said, in one way or another, several different times.

Yes, I know. Easter seems like it was a long time ago already. Believe me, this past week has felt like an eternity for me, as I recovered from food poisoning. But, it was just one week ago. And it is still very much Easter, even today.

Because Easter isn't just one day. It is fifty days. An entire season. We will continue to proclaim that Christ is risen for many weeks yet.

And so, on this second Sunday of Easter, our Gospel lesson picks up where we left off last week. Still on the same day as the resurrection itself, just a few hours later. And so it seems appropriate that since our reading is a continuation of our Easter reading, my sermon should be a continuation of my Easter sermon as well. And so I say again, the resurrection changes all our expectations. What did that mean last week?

Well, it meant that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb expecting a stone to be in front of it. But that was the wrong expectation. Because even if she and the disciples were convinced that Jesus was still dead, the stone covering the entrance of the tomb cried out, in its own way, that Jesus had risen from the dead.

It meant that Peter and John went to the tomb expecting to find Jesus' dead body laying inside. But that was the wrong expectation. Because the God who made all of creation – things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible – cannot be confined to a tiny tomb. If he wants to leave, he will leave. And death itself will not stop him.

It meant that Mary Magdalene expected to find only a gardener to help answer her questions. But that was the wrong expectation. For neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will separate Jesus from the ones he loves.

It meant that the disciples probably expected to spend that first Easter Sunday mourning the death of their dear teacher and friend. But that was the wrong expectation. For the resurrection turns weeping into joy. Sadness into gladness. Despair into hope. And Mary Magdalene's announcement, “I have seen the Lord,” should have transformed their funeral wake into a celebration.

It should have, but it hasn't. That's what we find in our lesson this week. Mary has seen the resurrected Christ. She has reported what he told her. Peter and John have seen the empty tomb. And the text says that at least John is fully convinced that Jesus has risen from the dead.

And yet, despite all of that, they are still hiding in a locked room, cowering in fear. Why? Well, because of the Jews. Not just any Jews. The Jewish authorities. The chief priests. The Sanhedrin. The Jewish high council. And these are powerful men.

You know, I was thinking about this the other day. When Jesus and the disciples met for the Last Supper, they had some inkling that the Jewish authorities were opposed to Jesus and might try to stop them, but what those Jewish authorities pulled off was really quite stunning. In roughly 12 hours, they had Jesus arrested, put on trial, convicted, sentenced to death, and nailed to a cross. All with the complete approval of King Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the residents of Jerusalem. The speed with which they pulled this assassination off would make Joseph Stalin proud.

And so now the disciples are huddled in a room together. And they are so terrified of what the Jewish authorities are going to do to them that they can't even think about what it means that the tomb is empty. All they can worry about is that the Sanhedrin is going to think that they stole Jesus' body and that's going to give them an excuse to arrest the disciples too and they're all going to be hanging on crosses by tomorrow morning.

It's kinda funny to think about now. But it certainly wasn't funny for them. It was deadly serious. They are absolutely terrified. That is, in fact, the expected reaction when faced with a life threatening situation. If you think there are people trying to hunt you down and kill you, you're afraid. I think you would be too.

And yet, that's not what Jesus wants for them. That's not what he expects of them. He shows up in that room, and the first thing out of his mouth is the words, *"Peace be with you."* Peace isn't fear. Peace is the opposite of fear. It makes no sense for him to say this in this situation. But he says it anyway.

In fact, he says it twice. He shows them his hands and his side and then he says again, *"Peace be with you."* And then he goes on, *"As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."* Sending you... out there. Into that scary world, full of people who want to murder you. Who hate you. Who hate me. Who hate this Gospel message that you are proclaiming. As I was sent to suffer and die, so you are sent to suffer and die.

Doesn't seem like Jesus makes much of an attempt to convince them of why they should have peace. But he doesn't really need to. Because the disciples are overjoyed at his very presence. He's alive. And that right there is reason enough to have peace.

Not with the world. They're more at war with the world than ever. The Jews and the Romans will still try to kill them. And they will occasionally succeed. Just as Christians around the world today are still persecuted and martyred for the faith. The resurrection doesn't give us peace with the world. Quite the opposite.

No, the resurrection gives us peace in different ways. For one, it gives us the peace of knowing that what we believe actually matters. I mean, I look at those disciples hiding in the room before Jesus arrived and I wonder, how many were just like Thomas? They assumed that everything they had believed was pointless. Dying for your faith is one thing. But they were about to die for a lie. For a fraud. For someone who couldn't actually save them.

Think of the peace that came from knowing that they were dying for the real deal. Jesus was dead and now he's alive. He really is the Son of God. I don't want to throw my life away on a lie, but I can die for him. I can die to make sure that people know that he really did rise from the dead. I'm at peace with that kind of death.

But for another, the peace that came through the resurrection also brought peace amongst the disciples themselves. I mean, you hear this argument that Thomas has with the other disciples. He basically calls them all fools. He will never believe. And as long as Thomas refuses to believe, there will be no peace among them.

But then Jesus shows up, once again with the words, *"Peace be with you."* And finally, there is peace among them. Because they are united in faith. They are united in their faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believe in him, they may have life in his name.

The resurrection changes them. It changes their expectations. It changes their fellowship. As it does all the new Christians that follow them. We read a bit about them in our passage from Acts. *"The full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul."* Why? How did they become so united? Because, *"with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."*

Preaching the resurrection united the church. And it united them not just in faith, but in action. *"No one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common... There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."*

These are people who have been transformed. They have been changed. Changed by the resurrection. Changed by their faith in Christ. The resurrection has changed all of their expectations.

The resurrection has changes all of our expectations. Because Christ is risen, we know we are not following a liar or a con-artist or a lunatic. Because Christ is risen, no matter our differences, we are united in our confession that he is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing in him gives life in his name.

Because Christ is risen, the things of this world do not matter. For we are one body working with one purpose to proclaim the forgiveness of sins. Sent into a world that hates us, but cannot hurt us. For the one who rose from the dead will raise us from the dead. And in that hope, in that promise, in him, we have peace. Amen.