Sermon for the 6th Sunday after Epiphany

February 13, 2022

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

The other day, I spent some time looking ahead at Lent and Easter. I use big post-it notes to map out the seasons, looking for common threads, themes that permeate the readings for a set of Sundays. Those post-its hang on the wall over my desk at home, a reminder that each Sunday is part of something bigger.

As I was making my list of Sundays for Easter, I was reminded of the fact that – every year – the Sunday after Easter is *always* the Sunday we hear about Thomas.

As much as I like routines, as much as I like things to be predictable and orderly…this always drives me nuts. There are so many other things we could hear as the Gospel reading. I can’t help feeling like we’re picking on Thomas for wanting to see the same thing the others had seen. Thomas wanted to see the marks on Jesus’ hands and side. And Jesus showed them to him.

But then I noticed the reading that we’ll hear the 3rd Sunday of Easter this year…where Jesus asks his followers for some fish. So he could *eat*.

And then the proverbial light bulb went off over my head.

Eating requires a body. A body that, apparently, still bore the scars of nails.

In our text from 1st Corinthians for today, Paul talks about the importance of Jesus’ resurrection. And how there were people who didn’t think it really happened. Didn’t think Jesus’ body was resurrected.

If Jesus’ body wasn’t resurrected, there would have been no marks on his hands or side for Thomas to see. He couldn’t have shared a meal on a beach with his followers.

Paul wanted the people of Corinth to understand that the resurrection is the cornerstone of our faith. If Jesus’ body wasn’t resurrected, then…what we believe about God starts to fall apart.

My favorite words during worship are the invitation to Communion: These are the gifts of God for the children of God. All who believe, all who want to believe, are welcome at the table of our Lord’s grace and mercy. Jesus is the host; we are the guests.

I like these words because they remind us that God is constantly reaching out to us, offering us a tangible morsel of grace, even when we’re not all that sure about what we believe.

These words acknowledge a reality of faith. Some days, we may find ourselves filled with confidence in the words of the Creed. Other days, our ability to trust in those words falters, and we hope that it’s enough that we *want* those words to be true.

Because in them lies hope. In them lies the hope that God is indeed stronger than death. That God has defeated evil.

In them lies the hope that God, the Creator of all that is, came to live on earth as a human being, not just to see what it would be like to occupy a human body for a little while, but because God loves that which God created *so very much* that God does not want to see it destroyed, but redeemed….and will go to extraordinary efforts to ensure our salvation.

Without the resurrection, Jesus was just a teacher who thought it would be great if we treated each other better. Who taught people to pay attention to helping those who have less, those who were hurting. Who told stories about lost sheep, families that need to learn to forgive each other, and fig trees that don’t bear fruit according to expectation. Without the resurrection, he’s the sort of false prophet he warns about in our Gospel text for today.

Without the resurrection, we’re misrepresenting God, misunderstanding God’s desires for creation. Even bearing false witness against God.

Without the resurrection, God is not stronger than death, and death has the final word.

But.

*With* the resurrection, there is hope. There is forgiveness of our sins. There is eternal life, in that mansion with many rooms that Jesus speaks of in John’s Gospel.

*With* the resurrection, the work we do to bring about peace and justice, the work we do to create a better tomorrow, is blessed by the God who has declared victory over the forces of evil.

*With* the resurrection lies the promise that we will one day be reunited with those who have gone on before us. Where we will join the great cloud of witnesses in eternal celebration at the banquet that never ends.

*With* the resurrection lies comfort for anyone who has ever been told they’re unimportant, worthless, beyond redemption, unlovable. Because the resurrection carries the promise that God’s love is not just unconditional, but perfect and unending. And it is that love which leads God to act so that we can know forgiveness of our sins, so that we can be cleansed and made whole, and spend eternity with God.

*With* the resurrection, we find ourselves invited into the plans God has for the redemption of us and all of creation.

Our trust in the promise of the resurrection of Jesus, in the promise of the resurrection of our own bodies, opens us up to wonder at the power of God.

Some days, our faith will be strong and confident. Some days, we’ll make do with *wanting* it to be true. *Hoping* it is true. Probably, most of the time we’re somewhere in between.

It is our hope that keeps us coming here.

We gather here, hungry for a word of peace in a broken, chaotic world.

We bring our heart’s desires and longings, our sorrows and fears, seeking some sign of God’s presence among us.

In this place, we hear the good news: The promise that God has defeated death. The promise that we are named and claimed as beloved children. The promise that our sins are forgiven. The assurance that we are loved. That we are worthy.

We are called to an incarnational faith. God became human to show us the lengths God will go to in order to ensure our salvation. And we are called to embody that faith through loving service, following the example of Jesus.

Fed and nourished by Word and Sacrament, we leave this place, bearing the hope found in the promises we hear, and remembering that we are part of something bigger than just ourselves.

We are a part of the great cloud of witnesses, the communion of saints across all time and place. Named and claimed, gathered and sent to share the good news of God’s love with all the world.

Let us pray: Merciful God, in you we find hope. When we are empty, fill us. When we are weak in faith, strengthen us. Form us for life that is faithful and steadfast, filled with abundant hope. Grant us the fullness of your grace. Amen.