

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
The Reverend Barbara Hutchinson
2nd Sunday of Easter Year C

There is a comfort to our routine. There is a heart-felt anticipation of our gathering within each of us. There is a joyful reunion, which occurs weekly. The table is set with care, the candles lit, the chairs arranged in a circle, and booklets handed out. As I greet each one of my soul sisters, my dear women friends, present at the Episcopal Home Healing service, love is gathered and shared. One of them always warms my hands, which have gotten chilled in the cloister on the way to the Home, one always gives me a long and loving hug, one's eyes light up with joy, one is bubbling over with news. We hold each other in prayer, we break bread together, we lift our souls through gift of music, we help each other follow the service and turn the pages of our booklets; we offer ourselves to each other and to God. This is the gift of Holy Communion made real.

Were even one of these elements present (the Eucharist, the love, the caring, the prayers, the music, the laying on of hands,) it would be clear to all involved that God's love has been revealed to us that day. However, what sanctifies, what draws it all together and makes our experience whole, is when I or any of the healing ministers, bend down, ask the resident if there is anything special she would like us to pray for, and then say: "We lay our hands upon you, in the name of the father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," or during Lent: "We lay our hands upon you, in the name of Jesus who died for our sins," or in the season of Easter, "We lay our hands upon you in the name of the Risen Christ." In any rendition of those words, we are proclaiming the power of the resurrection. We are tapping into an eternal force, which changed the world by God's raising Jesus from the dead, and giving each one of us the ability, responsibility, and directive to release this healing power into the world.

The portion of the story today from the Acts of the Apostles follows a recent period during which the apostles claimed their ability, responsibility, and directive to allow the healing power offered them by the post-resurrection Jesus, through the gift of the Holy Spirit. This was a time of intense and abundant healing they were offering to all as they walked through various towns. It was even said that, if the shadow of Peter crossed over a person's body, that person was healed, just as had happened to the woman who touched the fringe of Jesus' cloak.

With the power of the resurrection made manifest through the healing offered by the apostles, we know that healing is what the resurrected Christ is all about. The apostles were given this power so that they could continue Jesus' primary mission: to heal the world.

As people flocked to become the followers of the way, at the beginning of the Jesus Movement, naturally, a division occurred within the Jewish community. Some, (largely the

Sadducees,) denied the resurrection, while others boldly proclaimed it. The apostles in our story today had recently been imprisoned for their stance on the resurrection. During Jesus' earthly life, he pushed back against the political and moral climate of the day, offering an alternative way of looking at how to live the two commandments that he gave to / left with his disciples: "love God and love your neighbor." In our story today, the contentious issue had become: "do you believe or not believe in Jesus' resurrection?"

It's interesting to me that, some 2000 years later, many of us struggle with understanding the resurrection: doubting its reality, wondering how the miracle could have happened, and wondering "if I can't get my head around the resurrection then how can I call myself a Christian? Some of us grew up accepting the resurrection as a fact, and this was enough to carry us through to our adult faith; for others of us, we omit that line (we believe in the resurrection of the body) in the Nicene Creed which we are asked to recite each week, for we can't even comprehend Jesus' resurrection, let alone the resurrection of our own body.

I offer you a different invitation: not to explain, understand, or comprehend the resurrection of Jesus, but to allow it to make a claim on your life. Just as each time we come forward and receive that wafer in our hand at the Eucharist, the body of Christ, we are allowing the loving grace of God, who dared and deigned to show up in human form to make a claim on our life, so that we may become the body of Christ, not remembering the Last Supper as an event in the past, but rather as an ongoing event in our life. We are invited also to see the resurrection as an ongoing event in our lives; otherwise it doesn't matter that God raised Jesus from the dead.

So how do you allow the resurrection to make a claim on your heart? How do you proclaim the resurrection in your life? This question may sound daunting to you, but let's unpack it a bit.

Can you imagine proclaiming the power of the resurrection in your life by:

- Seeking beauty in music
- Hearing God's voice in creation
- Pausing, being still and finding God in the silence
- Loving radically
- Forgiving endlessly
- Hoping foolishly
- Caring for the marginalized
- Believing in love
- Striving for reconciliation
- Pushing back fear
- Acknowledging the goodness in each of us
- Believing that what appears to be final is not really the end
- Seeing and seeking goodness in others
- Building up, not tearing down, relationships

- Dedicating your life to opening the pathway for God to heal others.

If this sounds radical, culturally subversive, and makes you uncomfortable, you are allowing the resurrection to make a claim upon your heart. That is what Easter is all about.

If you feel uncomfortable about these potential demands on your heart, if you find yourself, like the disciples in our gospel story, behind locked doors, paralyzed by fear for what is required of you as a follower of the way, then let's think about what transformed those frightened disciples in our gospel into bold apostles in our first reading. First, they felt the spiritual presence of Jesus among them on the road to Emmaus and in the breaking of the bread. Jesus didn't look the same, but they knew it was him. Life was changed, not ended. We are offered this spiritual presence of Jesus each time we receive the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. The risen Christ can be for us an abiding presence in our lives.

Second, Jesus's first words to the disciples were "Peace be with you". Peace. This is what we receive when we find the risen Christ. This is what healing looks like. This is what resurrection is all about: the divine act in which God refused to allow death to determine the outcome of Jesus' ministry, but rather shows it to be the heart of his saving action. Jesus' peace doesn't stop the chaos of the world; rather, the abiding presence of the risen Christ is merely present within it, calming and un-troubling the heart, bringing peace, and somehow that is enough. His disciples don't need to go on without him. They have to go on with him, in a new way.

Each week, when I show up with the others to share Holy Communion at the healing service at the Episcopal Home, peace is what we each find. The chaos of our individual worlds is calmed, perhaps only for that hour, but somehow that's enough. We experience the risen Christ among us, for us, and with us, and we go on with Jesus, in a brand new way. This is what resurrection looks like.

Can you wonder with me: "what if our parish were so known for our ability to release God's healing power to our world, that the abundant and exuberant power of the resurrection would be so evident here, that people would want to just be in the shadow of us, so their lives could be touched and made whole?" And what if we would stretch our arms out and say, "Oh you who need to be healed, don't be in only the shadow, come into the center of our life?" I believe that this is God's dream of the resurrection being proclaimed here at St. Andrew's. Let us go out and proclaim boldly the power of the resurrection. Amen.