

Easter 2  
Church of the Good Shepherd, Silver City, NM

April 3, 2016  
Rev. Paul Moore

## **The Cost of Resurrection**

The Gospel lessons during the Great 50 Days of Easter all highlight post-resurrection appearances of Jesus or other passages that illustrate what it is all about. They make a very important point. Resurrection is not resuscitation. Resuscitation is what Jesus did for Lazarus. He was restored to the life he had lived before dying, and, though we have no record of it, we presume he died a natural death later in life. You have to die physically to be resuscitated.

The resurrection appearances of Jesus show Jesus to be more than what he was before Good Friday. After the resurrection Jesus appears here and appears there and He reveals himself when he wants to and conceals himself when he wants to. In today's Gospel he enters a room through a locked door. Resurrection is not resuscitation. It is rising to a new life, something greater than before. Seeds were present before the death, and now they come to full flower. Death that precedes resurrection can happen on any one of a number of levels, all giving the promise that when our final release comes our final and greatest resurrection will also happen.

Resurrection, then, is a costly thing. It costs you something that you had before. Like being required to give up a cracker in exchange for a cookie, it is, nonetheless, a loss, at least from this side of the equation. During Eastertide this year my sermons are going to focus on the cost of resurrection. Just what is it that we must give up if we are to be raised to new life? What we will see is that what we are asked to release is what is not good for us anyway, and what we receive in exchange is what is profoundly good, holy and joyful. What I hope is that by Pentecost we can get a sense of just what this resurrection life is all about; what it means to be a resurrection people, what it can look like to the world to be so transformed.

Today's Gospel lesson records two parallel appearances of Jesus. The first occurs on the afternoon of Resurrection Sunday. The disciples are gathered together in an upper room, hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. What do they fear? They fear the Jewish leadership will begin ferreting out all the followers of Jesus to crucify them as well. It was common practice in the day to eliminate competition that way. It is an either-or world, either Jesus or the Jewish leadership, either conformity or the Cross. The disciples' concept of the world has not really changed from before resurrection. They are living in the world of fear, the world of domination and power, the world that crucified Jesus. It is dualistic thinking, that is self-referential and ego-driven.

When Jesus appears in that room with them you can imagine their fear. "Is it really him or just his ghost?"

"No, it's really him, but, how in the world did he do that?"

You see, Jesus is not living in the world of pre-resurrection. Jesus is living in the realm of God on earth, where the power of love is greater than the power of ego and the vitality of self-giving is stronger than the fear of death. He calms their fears and then they are glad. Jesus is back! He raised Lazarus, he raised himself. He's back with us again like before.

Well, folks, Jesus is back, yes, but decidedly NOT like before. His presence will be with the disciples in a very different way now—through the Holy Spirit that he grants them. Their task now will be very different than before. Rather than following along after Jesus, stumbling, bumbling and mostly getting it wrong, they are to go out into the world in the power of the Spirit and be witnesses to Jesus. They are to unlock the doors (which were powerless against the power of God anyway) and stride out in power into the world they think wants to kill them, because in Jesus they know that love is stronger than death!

Wow! What a shift! Resurrection living requires that they let go of their heartfelt ideas of the status quo. This first resurrection appearance to the gathered group of disciples makes a very clear statement. Life has changed, the old order no longer works. You are to live a different kind of life in the world.

The second happens a week later. What we didn't know before we now find out. Thomas was not with them the first time. We know Judas is not with them, he has gone to his reward, for what it was worth, but Thomas is a believer, not a cynic like Judas. Like the other disciples, he's got a firm grip on the status quo. The status quo said that if you die you're gone. He had seen Jesus die. Jesus was gone! Jesus makes a repeat appearance just for him. "Yes, I died," says Jesus, "and yes, I'm still here, though not as you thought, but a whole lot more." Thomas' response reveals what our response must include. The move into resurrection life is not a matter of figuring it out and giving mental assent to something. It is a conversion of heart, a change of being, it is a death and resurrection in and of itself. Thomas, upon seeing Jesus, does not see just wounds in a body, he sees God incarnate, the One who brings all things together. Yielding, then, to the One who is before him, his whole life changes in an instant. He dies to the status quo, and is raised to a new life of grace.

It's the same thing as with the other disciples, really, only because this story is focused on

an individual rather than a group we get the individual experience which, I assume, was common to them all. The resurrection will always require the death of our fears. Those fears so often manifest in a firm grasp on the status quo.

If you're on top of the economic heap of the world you cling to the status quo because it serves you. You fear the loss of your privileged place in the world. When you look across the globe, this category includes most everyone in this church this morning.

If you're in the middle somewhere you cling to the status quo because it serves your purposes sufficiently to make life OK. You fear loss of what you do have. In terms of the American economy, most of us fit here.

If you're on the bottom you cling to the status quo because that's all you've ever known. You so live on the edge that any disruption is just too close to total collapse. The grip of poverty is your life, and you see very little else.

Resurrection living cuts through all of that. It promises freedom from being controlled by riches to the rich, freedom from the fear of loss to the middle class, and freedom from the fear of total collapse to the poor. But it does so only at the cost of the fear of change. It sacrifices our concept of the status quo in order to give us heaven instead. It requires the giving up of dualistic thinking about big questions in order to replace it with the unitive power of self-giving love.

If that is the meaning of the resurrection it is more than just a day we celebrate and our hope of heaven. We, too, stand in the upper room. Jesus appears among us and breathes on us the Holy Spirit and then sends us out in mission. We, too, are sent out in the power of self-giving love into a world that is totally built on either-or, ego-driven thinking.

In his Easter message to the Church Presiding Bishop Michael Curry quoted George McLeod, founder of the Iona Community as saying,

*I simply argue that the cross be raised again at the centre of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves, on the town garbage dump, at a crossroads so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. It was the kind of place where cynics talk smut, thieves curse, soldiers gamble. That's where he died. And that's where we as Christians ought to be and what we as Christians ought to be about.*

It's a bit like jumping off a high rock into cold water. If you think about it too long you

won't do it, but if you just close your eyes and jump the thrill is totally amazing!

If your life after Easter is the same as it was before then maybe you're like Thomas, walking through life with a death-grip on what you know, terrified of what you do not know. If you are to know the power of the resurrection, then you must pry open your fingers and open your hands. You must let the Spirit blow through you and fill you with unconditional love, and then, you will see, life will never quite be the same again—in an incredibly good way!