

Resurrection

The Rev. William W. Rich
Trinity Church in the City of Boston
Third Sunday of Easter
April 30, 2006

It's night in the gospel we just heard, the night of Easter day. It has been a very long day for the disciples. In fact the day, as it always does, began before dawn with that event that is not an event but is the beginning of the rest of history that no one saw. God worked it in secret. We call it resurrection and when we encounter the disciples in the gospel that we heard this morning, they're still trying to take it in and maybe here on the third Sunday of Easter, like them, we are still trying to take it in.

What does resurrection mean? His, ours, the world's? What does it mean? Think what they have just been through. In case you don't have empathy for their slowness to catch on or don't have empathy for your own, think what they've been through. It's only two days after he died. If your best friend, someone on whom you had pinned all your hopes had died on Friday, would you be here this morning singing words of rejoicing, surely believing, with unshakable faith, that life was going on for your friend? Would you have gotten it? If your faith is that strong, I'd love to talk to you after the service. They hadn't gotten it and you and I find it hard to "get" resurrection. To understand what it is, to live into it, because, like them, there is so much loss in our life that seems to cut across the message of resurrection.

Some of you, this week, lost people dear to you. They are no longer in this world. Others of you, this week, have been waiting for test results that may be, for you, a death knell. Or perhaps, you have been searching for years for a job that has not come your way, or your whole life for that love that you want to solace you and you've given up. It just doesn't seem to be there. Or maybe you look more widely; maybe loss hits you through the losses of others. People against whom others are prejudiced, who can't get jobs because of who they are or what they don't have, money, education. Or maybe you think about those who are so hungry and without a home that they are dying for both. The people of Darfur and others. How do we believe in resurrection in a world where loss, despair, confusion seems so present so much of the time? How could they have believed in it?

We have good company, don't we, when it's hard to believe. Into the midst of that hard, hard fact that life includes suffering and loss, confusion, despair, comes the One they least expect. They'd heard word that He was raised from the dead, but as Luke says right before the gospel that we heard this morning, it had been brought to them by women and they thought it was just an idle tale. Sometimes we think the signs of hope are just an idle tale too, don't we? Our cynicism, our thinking that we know it all, our worldly wiseness makes us think, "Oh hope, huh, it's not that simple!" And into the midst of their being like that and our being like that comes the One whom death cannot hold, and they don't know what to do, they think He's a ghost, they are terrified, they're confused. Isn't that

what its like when hope begins to spring up? We don't know what to do. It doesn't make sense in our situation. We can't take it in.

But there He is anyway. He didn't wait for them to believe. He stood in their midst, in the midst of their unbelief, their confusion and He stands with us. Such a simple verb, stand, but isn't that what we need when something is going wrong in our lives? Simply someone to stand there with us, not to try to talk us out of what we feel and say "Oh, you ought to be in a different place, you ought to be more faithful, more hopeful." No we need someone simply to stand there with us, to share with us whatever woundedness we are feeling. And how much more helpful is it then, when we see that He is wounded himself.

The One who stands with us in our loss knows about loss. He stands there. But that verb which seems so simple, isn't quite as simple as it seems, because, in case you didn't know this, the Greek verb for stand is the root for the verb, resurrect. All resurrect as a verb means in Greek is to stand up again. That's all it means. He has stood up again when they least expected it because, of course, he has stood up again out of death, in the face of death, against. He is standing up against death and loss and all the confusion that goes along with death and loss. So He not only stands there with them in their loss, but He stands up against it and begins to bring some hope. Very slowly, very gently, not berating them, but offering them and inviting them into something new. Because the next thing that He says to them is peace.

Peace be with you. Such a simple word again, it seems. But the Hebrew word for peace is so different from the English word for peace. When you hear peace, if you are like me, the first thing that you think is "Ahh, cessation of conflict, rest, relaxation." That's not what the Hebrew word "Shalom" really means. Shalom means a "healing into wholeness". A healing into wholeness. In other words, it's a word that invites you into a process. It doesn't impose something as a state of being. It says, come on into this healing, into wholeness. He is inviting them and us to a new place. Oh so gently, because, like them, we're still heartbroken much of the time.

But He doesn't stop there. He doesn't stop by standing with them. He doesn't stop by standing up against death. He doesn't stop by inviting them into a healing that moves them towards wholeness. He says one more thing that can seem so odd, so very odd. "Have you anything to eat?" he says. Knowing full well, because he can see it, that they just had fish for dinner. Now a lot of modern liberal scholars say what He's really trying to do is demonstrate that He isn't a ghost. He's going to eat so that they can see He is not just a ghost. Maybe. I think He's doing something else. I think He's asking them to remember that last time that He asked them, "do you have anything to eat?" and they brought Him some fish. Do you remember? Of course you do, the feeding of the 5000 there on the hillside. All those hungry people. They'd been out there all day and all the disciples could say was "oh, send them away to get something to eat" and He said "No. Don't you have something for them?" And out of the simple five loaves and two fish they got fed. There was sharing beyond any sharing that you and I can imagine. There was something amazing and wonderful that happened there. So much so that there were 12

baskets full leftover. And I think He is saying to them, “Do you remember that? You didn’t expect that to happen. You are not expecting this, for Me to be here.” But I think He’s doing one more thing in inviting them to feed Him. Because what He does as he feeds with them, as He uses what they are willing to share, is that He tells again the whole story of His life and its meaning. And what he emphasizes, Luke says, is that it was necessary for God Incarnate, God in our flesh, the Christ, to suffer.

Another important word. It doesn’t mean to go out and get yourself beat up. It doesn’t mean to be a carpet for people to walk on. The verb He uses for suffer means “to have your heart with others and to experience pain because of that.” He’s inviting them to experience with Him His own hunger. He’s hungry, He needs something to eat, will you join me in this and feed me? And He’s inviting them into the process of resurrection. Because finally friends, and I hope that none of you will think that this is heresy, His resurrection means nothing if it is just for Him. He did not come into this world, or die, or be raised from the dead for Himself. The love that God was bestowing on the world continues to be bestowed on the world through the resurrection. It’s for us and for everyone in situations of loss and confusion and despair and the only way it can be experienced is if it is shared like bread and fish.

And so He invites us into resurrection. He invites us to spread resurrection. How might you do that? Well you’ve already heard Bishop Donovan invite you to buy some food at Coffee Hour to help in the Hunger Walk for next week. Or to sign up to give money in the Hunger Walk. That is certainly a place to begin. Resurrection for the half million people in Massachusetts who are hungry, not Darfur, but Massachusetts. Or you could write a check to Episcopal Relief and Development for the relief of people in Darfur or you could do both. Or you could take your talent of knowing what it is to suffer loss in your own life and offer your shoulder to just one other person. Or you could take your time to sit with one other person who needs to know that resurrection is possible. Because you see, His resurrected body, if it is anywhere, is here in us. As we are experiencing it and sharing it with others, the resurrection comes into being. If it is not experienced and not shared it does not happen, does it? It does not happen. And so as He offers us peace, healing into wholeness and asks, “have you anything to eat?” He asks us to share resurrection with each other and with those beyond these walls. And we all need it. Will you join Him? Will you join Him? If you do, then indeed, Christ is Risen. Amen.