

“An Empowered Faith” © Rev. Seth D. Jones

Easter Morning - March 31st, 2013

Scripture: Acts 10; Luke 24

Cornelius has had a vision in which the Lord has told him to invite Peter, the disciple of Jesus, to his home. Likewise, the Lord gives Peter a vision that he should go to Cornelius' house. Cornelius is a centurion in the Roman Legion. Boundaries are dissolving in the advent of Christ's resurrection, which we celebrate this morning. When Peter arrives, a dinner is being served. They ask Peter to speak about what he knows. And then Peter proclaims to them the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In our Gospel reading, the women who come to the tomb to care for the body of Jesus - a traditional activity in the day - find, instead of Jesus, two angels and an empty tomb. “Why are you looking for the living among the dead?”, they say to the Marys and Joanna. And the women run back to the disciples and proclaim to them the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (The women are the apostles to the apostles).

On this day, on Easter Sunday, we celebrate and proclaim Christ's resurrection. Every other Sunday is simply a commentary on this Sunday. In other words, for those of you visiting us today, we do this every Sunday. In one way or another we proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a statement of faith. It is a foundation of belief. It is, quite simply, what defines us as followers of Jesus Christ. We are people of the resurrection.

Peter is empowered by God to proclaim the mystery of the resurrection to the Romans. “I see now that God knows no partiality.” No one group is excluded or included in the great mystery and blessing of God through Jesus Christ. Peter is called to share the news, the Good News with those who he would not normally associate with. He is called to proclaim the mystery of God in Christ.

“Proclamation” is the word we use to announce and tell others the news of the day. Proclamation is the act of speaking without proof or explanation. And this is what we do on Easter Sunday. Proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today, I will not prove it to you. Today, I will not explain it to you. Today, I will simply do what Peter does and do what the women do, which is simply proclaim Jesus' resurrection.

The reason for this is that we are expressing the mystery of our faith. How do we talk about *mystery*? How do we proclaim and speak of things which are mysteries? First of all, it is important to distinguish between kinds of mystery. The mystery of God is not in the same class as other mysteries. The mystery of God is what is known as an Absolute Mystery. There are Absolute Mysteries and there are Relative Mysteries. Relative mysteries are those things which can be understood but currently are not. Questions of science fall under the realm of relative mysteries, for instance. Other relative mysteries might be:

How do economies work? Or, where is my money going?

What is this person like? Or, my wife is a mystery to me?

Where do single socks go when you had two when you did the laundry?

These are things that can eventually have reasonably accurate answers. They are not currently understood but may be understood soon.

Absolute mysteries, or rather The Absolute Mystery, God, works in a different way. The deeper our understanding and relationship with God, the more questions there are and the greater the mystery becomes. There is no future in which God will become less of a mystery to us, whether on this side of the grave or the other.

And this is Good News. It is Good News because God is the end point and the beginning of all things. As God tells Moses in the Exodus story, when Moses asks God's name, God says, "My name is *I am that I am.*" Or, I am that which I am becoming. Or, My being is what I will be. God's being, God's essence, is absolute. The Alpha and the Omega, if you will. And this essential being, this singular *I Am*, takes on human form and human flesh in Jesus Christ. We call this the Incarnation - God becoming human so that we might become truly human through the life that Christ lives through us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is the mystery Peter is witness to. This is the mystery of the empty tomb. God in Christ resurrects and in that great work, overcomes death, evil and bondage to those things which separate us from God. It is a mystery which grows deeper the more we come to know it. It is a mystery which, as Peter says, knows no partiality. It is a mystery which includes you and me and all of creation. It is a mystery which has as its goal, as Colossians 2 says, *that our hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* Knowing God's mystery, which is Christ, means knowing the source of all wisdom and knowledge.

Today, then, is the high holy day of the faith. And it is a day of great simplicity and of absolute mystery. The simplicity and the mystery are the same thing. We simply proclaim the mystery of the faith. We, like the Marys and Joanna, see that in the empty tomb, which holds death, failure, sin, evil, Christ is no longer here. Why do we, as the angels say, seek the living among the dead? Instead, we proclaim an empty tomb, which empowers us to proclaim to others, to proclaim to you, the great mystery of the faith:

***Christ is risen today. He is risen, indeed.***

Because Christ is risen, death has been overcome. "*Death has been swallowed up in victory! Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting? Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! 1 Corinthians 15:54-55*

Because Christ is risen, guilt and evil no longer have power over us. "*(God's righteousness) will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Romans 4:24-25*

Because Christ is risen, we no longer need to fear death and the future. In the resurrection story in Matthew, when the disciples see the resurrected Jesus, *Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."* **Matthew 28:10**

Because Jesus Christ, the one who three days ago died on a cross for us, is risen, this is the mystery, the great and absolute mystery, which empowers our faith. In the mystery, our faith seeks understanding. Our understanding deepens our relationship with God. And the mystery of God expands, the love of God grows and the glory of Christ is shown to all, without partiality. Jesus Christ resurrected is a statement of belief. Jesus Christ resurrected is a promise and lived hope. It is a proclamation. And we proclaim it today so you might know the love, peace, glory and life of Christ resurrected today and all days and be empowered by the great mystery of being among those who consider themselves to be children of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

*Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God [re](#) glory*

*forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. **Romans 16:25-27***