

P Christ is risen!
C He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Luke's accounting of the Acts of the Apostles reminds us in our first reading today that,

³⁰ While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (Acts 22:30-31)

Once again, our faith informs us that through Jesus Christ, God judges us and holds together all things in heaven and on earth. And because of our human ignorance, through God's great mercy He abides with each one of us through the Spirit of His truth and peace. That truth and that peace is the promise of the resurrection given to us through the very faith stirred in each of us by the Advocate who is sent to us. This promise is the light of hope in our darkest of times. This hope is what holds all things together, abides with us, and enables us all to move forward each day.

This past week I was asked to preside at two funerals and then sit with the family of a long-standing member of this congregation who just passed away. No, I am not complaining, but these events have caused me to deeply reflect on the question that I have been dogged with since Easter: what are the implications of the resurrection?

Today's Gospel lesson tells us that those implications are the hope in the presence of Jesus Christ. One of the conclusions that can be drawn from the resurrection is the very presence of our risen Lord Jesus Christ...especially in this season of the Eastertide when we are frequently reminding ourselves by proclaiming that Christ is risen; He is risen indeed. However, with that conclusion comes the other question, do we recognize the presence of the risen Christ and what is our response to that presence?

Once again, we are in the Gospel of John and as I said before, "sin" is NOT a moral category about behavior within this Gospel, but it is a theological category about one's response to the revelation of God in Jesus...one's response to the revelation of God in Jesus...or the very presence of God with us.¹

This past week has caused me to ask myself this question and then answer it when proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ in the face of death. How do we respond to tragedy or death? How is this family who lost a very vibrant mother to a sudden and senseless accident...how are they to respond? How does the family of a very caring teacher of special needs kids respond to their mother's death? How are we to respond to the loss of Bob Oblender, knowing that death is what this dear man has been praying for?

¹ *The New Interpreter's Bible, In Twelve Volumes, Volume Nine, The Gospel of Luke, The Gospel of John.* Nashville: Abington Press, 1995. The Gospel of John 9:1-12, The Healing Miracle, page 653.

Today our Gospel reminds us of what our response just might be when Jesus says to his disciples:

¹⁶ ...I will ask the Father, and he will give you *another* Advocate, to be with you forever.
(John 14:16)

Jesus is telling the disciples and he is telling us that God will give us *another* Advocate. *Another advocate*...what Jesus is saying here in this passage is that I have been your advocate...but I am going away, I will not leave you orphaned, there will be another. Jesus is informing the disciples and us that the same type of person as one already mentioned will be with us forever. Jesus in this comment is telling us that he is the initial advocate and another, just like him, will be with us always...even in the face of tragedy, the face of struggles, or the face of death. John also communicates that same understanding of who the “initial” advocate is in his first of three letters:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; (1 John 2:1)

We are as Jesus says, little children. In essence, Jesus is reminding us that we are just simply ordinary folk with ordinary weaknesses and limitations...and most of all we are sinners. Yet today he is reminding us that as the risen Christ, He promises to empower us and to infuse us with the same life-giving, powerful Holy Spirit that so empowered him. Jesus promises us that he will so inhabit our lives as to live in us and to work through us...no matter what we face. Through this Advocate, we find ourselves faithful to Jesus, not by our own power, but through the power of his Advocate, the Holy Spirit.²

Just as Jesus is the advocate for God, the one who makes God known to the world, so too, the Holy Spirit is the one who makes Jesus known to us. It is the Holy Spirit who has opened our eyes to the way, the truth, and the life of Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit, our advocate who has opened our eyes and our hearts to the promise of hope made known by Jesus Christ.

The implications of the resurrection is the Advocate, the Holy Spirit that abides with us and in us and enables us to see the hope we have in the face of death, hope in the truth that is with us and given to us through the other “unseen & unknown” advocate, Jesus Christ who is the personification of truth and life, the personification of God’s love given for us...He is the very hope we cling to in our dark times.

Its funny, as I was working on this sermon and reading over it many times, I didn’t want to sound like some arrogant new-age motivational speaker spewing some condescending drivel about hope, because hope is much deeper and more complex then we can even begin to fully understand.

As an undergrad attending Millersville, I encountered Viktor Frankl’s book *Man’s Search For Meaning*. Victor Frankel was a psychiatrist who was imprisoned at Auschwitz and Dachau concentration camps in Nazi Germany during WWII and it is in his book that I began to see the complexity of the hope we are given in Jesus Christ.

² William H. Willimon, *Pulpit Resource*, Vol. 39, No. 2, Year A, April, May, June 2011, page 41

As Frankel is liberated from Auschwitz, we read in this book that hope becomes very complex and almost arduous. It does so because hope for most of the survivors was returning home and being with one's family and that hope is quickly dashed in the joyful reality of liberation. Their hope was dashed because the family they hoped to return to did not survive the camps and their homes were destroyed. Their very reason for living in the camp's day-to-day brutality and humiliation was the happiness they found in the hope of reuniting with their families and returning to their home...this was their hope.

Liberation brought an end to the suffering of brutal and humiliating physical torture but the mental suffering was only beginning. Frankl wrote that when he thought he had "reached the absolute limit of all possible suffering he found that suffering has no limits and that he could still suffer more"³...suffer more when the hope of reuniting with loved ones was gone. Frankl explains it this way:

We all said to each other in camp that there could be no earthly happiness which could compensate for all we had suffered. We were not hoping for happiness – it was not that which gave us courage and gave meaning to our suffering, our sacrifices and our dying. But this must not be discouragement...it should provide an added stimulus.⁴

They now found hope in their suffering, torcher, and dying and not in the happiness they once knew. Frankel concludes the chapter by saying that the "crowning experience of all," for those who survived and returned, is the wonderful feeling that, after all we had suffered, there is nothing we need fear anymore – except God."⁵

Even when everything you know and love has been brutalized to what seems to be an astounding depth, God is still there...at the end of all that and if God is there, our hope is there as well. Paul's words reflect this sentiment in his letter to the Romans:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

God has given us an Advocate...a helper, a companion, a spirit, an intercessor...amidst this world, to transform our thinking beyond our world, our culture, and even ourselves...God gives to each of us through our faith another Advocate, which is God's own Spirit...to be with us forever.

This is our hope, this is the promise of salvation and new life found in Jesus Christ that becomes so deeply embedded into our souls and that nothing, as St. Paul tells us in Romans, nothing will be able to separate any of us from that hope in the love given to us in Jesus Christ. With that Spirit...that helper, that companion, that intercessor...and through our faith we learn of the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot give, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But we know him, because he abides with us, and in us and is reflected and revealed for all the world to see and feel in our actions toward others.

³ Frankl, Viktor E., *Man's Search For Meaning*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959. Page 99.

⁴ Ibid, page 99

⁵ Ibid, page 100

God has promised NOT to leave us orphaned making us all God's own. Our time right now may cause us to fear, it may cause us to suffer, or it may leave us lonely, but God abides with us in the promise that we are judged in righteousness by Jesus Christ whom God has appointed and given to each of us.

The implication of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the hope we are given in the darkest of times through suffering and death. This hope is what Jesus Christ gives to us all...this is the implication of the resurrection and Good News for us all.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.