

SECOND CALL

Easter Sunday, 2012 – John 20:1-18

Every once in a while, Paul Bosch uses a line that always grabs my attention: “proof of the Resurrection!” he’ll exclaim to an old friend he hasn’t seen for a long time. It’s a great line because of its nuances – a little exaggeration and flattery and, at the same time, a little insult: “I thought you were dead!” is the subtext of his comment. It’s also a great line because it touches the holy which, by definition, is not to be touched. Most religious humour turns on this point of touching the untouchable – in this case, it is the hinge-point of Christian doctrine, Christ’s resurrection.

And then there’s irony: the suggestion that someone with the conviction of Paul Bosch would even need to look for proof of the Resurrection. He’s been a pastor of our church for over 50 years: he has instructed thousands of students and parishioners on the mysteries of the Christian faith over his distinguished career as author, pastor, and teacher. As most of you know, we have invited him to be our 45th Anniversary preacher next Sunday, because he is a distinguished and much-loved member of this parish. A delightful undercurrent of irony makes us smile at the suggestion that Paul Bosch, of all people, looks for proof of the Resurrection.

But author Marilynne Robinson observes that faith in Christ’s resurrection is the main preoccupation of our biblical accounts of Easter; that it is not just doubting Thomas who struggles for faith in the risen Christ: it is all the disciples!

“Mary Magdalene,” she writes, “when she finds the tomb empty, simply assumes someone has carried the body away...Peter and the other disciples run to see the empty tomb when they are told of it, but apparently draw no conclusions – ‘Then the disciples went back to their homes,’ [we read]. Even after Mary has spoken with angels, she explains the body’s absence to herself in just the way any rationalist might do, not even pausing to wonder” [Chicago: *The Christian Century*, Vol. 129, No. 7, April 4, 2012, p. 22].

But Marilynne Robinson also suggests that it is *no wonder* the disciples needed proof; that they were first-and-foremost acquainted with Jesus’ humanity and, consequently, his mortality. The image of his crucifixion and death had been imprinted on them: what better confirmation could there be of Jesus’ complete humanity than the fact of his death?

And so, the reports of his encounter with the two disciples with whom he shares supper at their home in Emmaus; his presence with the disciples after that meal in the house in Jerusalem where, again, he eats; and then the breakfast he shares with Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John and two others on the beach of the Sea of Galilee are essential in broadening the disciples’ understanding of how extraordinary was their experience of the man Jesus. They had not only been called to follow him as disciples, learn from him, and share in his ministry, they were now called to proclaim his resurrection. It is a second call or perhaps a deeper call than the first where, we read, several of them had left everything behind – employment, home, family – and followed him as his disciples. This second call, the call to proclaim the unbelievable, the unimaginable, his resurrection, was the greater call. Who would believe them?

Interestingly, it is their sandals into which we place our feet this Easter Sunday morning, some 2000 years later. We gather for worship because faith has called us into the community of those who follow Christ’s proclamation of the good news of God. Many of us are baptized as disciples of Jesus and have affirmed our baptism after spending two or three years studying Scripture and Christian doctrine. We do everything that is expected of us: “live among God’s faithful people, hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper, proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, serve all people following the example of Jesus, and strive for justice and peace in all the earth” [Augsburg Fortress: *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 236]. But there’s a second call embedded in those seemingly achievable requirements of Christian discipleship; and the second call is to proclaim Christ’s resurrection in a world that is every bit as skeptical, if not more so, as the world known by the first disciples. If we respond to Christ’s second call, who will believe us?

To answer my own question, I turned again to Jesus, because if there is one thing the Resurrection teaches the church it is the unity and perfection of his testimony: we cannot speak of his ministry or his

wisdom without connecting it to his life, his suffering, his death, and his resurrection. There is one perfect and definitive proclamation of the gospel of God, and it is the life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

And so I looked at his proclamation, and I saw before me the things that he lived for and that he died for: love, justice, peace, wholeness, freedom, equality, welcome, mercy, grace, transformation, hope, community, friendship. I may have missed as many as I noticed, but there's more than enough for us to proclaim – because love is crucified by hate; justice is crucified by injustice and the abuse of power; peace is crucified by violence, oppression, and war; wholeness is crucified by all the conditions and powers that pull us apart in body, mind, and spirit, both as individuals and as a people; freedom is crucified by everything that confines us; equality is crucified by systems and people invested in privilege and power at the expense of others; welcome is crucified by exclusion; mercy is crucified by cruelty and vengeance; grace is crucified by legalism; transformation is crucified by cynicism and fear; hope is crucified by despair; community is crucified by individualism and willful isolation; friendship is crucified by alienation, estrangement, and separation.

All of a sudden, I realized that our second call is not that impossible; that when we love one another, do justice and speak truth to power, make peace, encourage wholeness, provide for freedom, embrace equality, welcome the stranger, show mercy, forgive one another, work and pray for God's will to be done within and among us, allow faith to lead us in the time of trial, contribute to and participate in strengthening community, and seek friendship in one another, we become the proclamation of Christ's resurrection. He is risen for others, because he is alive in us – in all that we do and say, in all that we love as gospel and in all that we reject as not-gospel. We answer the second call of discipleship by becoming the proclamation; by being, as Paul Bosch would put it, "proof of the Resurrection."

In a moving account of how she received a unique and beautiful expression of the Spirit from her father, Stephanie Paulsell writes, "Surely one of the greatest gifts of God to us is that through what we love and what we share, we reach one another in knowable and unknowable ways." May our love of the gospel be how we proclaim Christ's resurrection in a world that hungers for its impossible message [Chicago: *The Christian Century*, Vol. 129, No. 7, April 4, 2012, p. 39].