



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
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APRIL 12, 2015
THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Holding Our Children
John 20:19-31; Acts 4:32-35

I like this day. I like it simply because it is another day to live, to “rise and shine and give God the glory” for another opportunity to enjoy all that has been created for us. More than that, however, I like this day because it is a week after Easter. The Easter bunny has hopped away, the eggs have been found, and the treats consumed. The baskets are back in the closet. The new frocks are no longer entirely new. The festivities are over and yet, it is still Easter and time to get down to business.

I like this Second Sunday of Easter because we often read the story we heard earlier about Jesus appearing to the disciples for a second time. It was a week later for those disciples as well, but they are still hiding out in that upper room. I like Thomas’ honesty which is surpassed only by his devotion to Christ once he realizes he is alive. I like the mix of excitement and fear, of wonder and of doubt, and of embracing or rejecting the Gospel.

It is relatively easy to believe Jesus is risen on Easter Sunday. The shout is lifted up all over the world. For the most part, nature usually cooperates, at least in our part of the world, and celebrates with color and vibrancy. My goodness, even the staunchest skeptic has to feel a bit weak-kneed when Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus” is sung—especially by our choir. We can all affirm that Christ is alive on Easter, but a week later things are different, aren’t they?

We wake up to news of murderous attacks and devastating tornados. We hear politicians bickering, people protesting, news analysts speculating, and other folks complaining. With all the discord and suffering in the world, can Jesus really be alive?

In his blog this past week, Micky Maudlin, Vice President and Executive Editor for HarperOne Publishers, recalled the sermon his pastor preached last Sunday. In that sermon, he focused on what Mr. Maudlin called, “two throwaway lines” in the New Testament, two verses that rarely get any

attention. In the Book of Acts, Luke notes that, following his resurrection, “Jesus provided ‘many convincing proofs that he was alive’ (Acts 1:3)” while in the Gospel of Matthew, we learn that “‘some doubted’ (Matthew 28:17).”¹ Today, scripture and tradition offer abundant support of Jesus’ resurrection, but some people do not believe. Others, like many of us who do believe, still on occasion have doubts.

Mickey Maudlin’s pastor did not leave him hanging with his doubts last week; he pointed out that for him, the proof of the resurrection was in the transformed lives of the people who followed Jesus and continued his ministry. The witness of the church, the people called out by God to share his love, is the proof that Jesus rose from death and continues to live.²

I agree, especially when I read a story like today’s lesson from the Acts of the Apostles. Listen to what happened among the people who did believe in Christ’s resurrection:

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Acts 4:32-35

Not only did those early believers trust that Jesus had been raised from the dead, they actually staked their lives on it. They pooled their resources and met the needs of everyone in their fellowship. People continued to join them as the faith spread across the Roman Empire and then through the ages and across the world until we find ourselves in this sanctuary on this day. We would not be here if no one had believed and no one had acted on the premise that Jesus is alive.

Proof of Jesus’ resurrection is found not simply in the words we claim to be authoritative or the ones that we speak. No formula of faith can prove

¹Michael G. Maudlin, “Does the Church Provide Proof for the Resurrection?” *News and Pews from HarperOne*, HarperOne Publishers (April 10, 2015); available online at: <http://www.newsandpews.com/does-the-church-provide-proof-for-the-resurrection/>.

²Maudlin.

that he conquered death. The earliest and, I believe, only true confession of faith is but four simple words: Jesus Christ is Lord!

Jesus Christ is Lord, not because a book says it or we post it on the walls of our public buildings or include it our public prayers or use it for our own personal benefit. Jesus Christ is Lord only because people like you and me make it so when we yield our lives to Christ and allow God to guide us in what we do and say. Jesus Christ is Lord when we make him Lord of life. The writer of the Letter of James said, “Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith” (James 2:18b). A bit earlier he summed up his thoughts on the matter this way: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27).

The point is that our faith is not merely affirming the proper words. It is the choice to live as Jesus lived. The Apostle James’ concern was not that we should help widows and orphans to the neglect of everyone else; rather, he understood that we are to attend to the needs of the most vulnerable people among us—and widows and orphans were the most vulnerable people at that time. Jesus himself had a particular interest in the well-being of children since they are completely dependent and most vulnerable. One of the ways that I think we can bear witness to our belief in the resurrection is in how we care for our children. To enable all children to live fully as God intends is to affirm the gift of life God has given to us all.

According to the Children’s Defense Fund, 14.7 million children in the United States are poor. Another 6.5 million are extremely poor, meaning that they survive on half of the poverty level of income. The consequences of poverty on the lives of children are critical. Hunger alone can result in “lower reading and math scores, greater physical and mental health problems, higher incidence of emotional and behavioral problems, and a greater chance of obesity.” Poverty is often the cause of lower rates of high school graduation and higher rates of crime.³

Children are vulnerable to violence and abuse. On average, a child or teenager in America is injured or killed by a gun every half hour. Over the past fifty years, three times more children and teenagers have been killed by gun violence in America than America lost soldiers to the wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq combined. On average, a child is abused or neglected every forty-seven seconds in our nation. Each day in the United States over

³“Ending Child Poverty Now,” Copyright © 2015 Children's Defense Fund.

four thousand children are arrested.⁴ Wars, oppressive regimes, poverty, and abuse throughout the world make childhood a dangerous experience for many children.

All children are vulnerable, and every community is diminished when any of its children go to bed hungry, when any of its children do not have a bed in which to sleep, when any of its children spend the night in jail, or when any of its children wake up in a hospital because of violent injuries. A community is diminished when parents cannot find work to support their family, when a child cannot read by the third grade, when schools do not have adequate resources to provide teachers and textbooks and classrooms for learning, or when a young person drops out of school. We all suffer not only when a young person is not equipped to fulfill his or her dreams for life but when they no longer have those dreams. When we fail our children, we fail as a community—and, as followers of Christ, we fail in our witness to his resurrection.

It was said of the early Christian community in Jerusalem that it held all things in common. It may be the case that many of those believers thought Jesus would return soon and they would have no need of earthly possessions. They sold their homes and property and shared their resources with the larger community so that the needs of everyone could be met. Nevertheless, as Jesus has tarried, communal sharing and ministry have remained the model for those of us who believe. We care about our own, but we also care about the larger community because it is God's own as well.

As a society, we operate this way to some extent. We identify needs in the community and pay our taxes and other fees to meet those needs. We volunteer and serve in order to benefit the common good. I believe that as Christians we are called to reach further and do more. If Christ is alive, if the resurrection is a reality in our lives, then we are to live as people with a purpose. We are to care for all who are vulnerable, to advocate for anyone who has no voice, to provide for the ones who cannot take care of themselves. By our ministry, we are to witness to the world that Christ is alive.

What can we do? First, we pay attention to our children. We notice them and let them know that they are important to us. We provide spiritual, emotional, and physical support to all children. We do what is necessary to provide quality education for all children. I am concerned that our community

⁴"The State of America's Children," Copyright © 2014 Children's Defense Fund.

will be discussing the possibility of dividing our school system when so many worked hard to unite it years ago. I would hope that whatever decision is made is based on the best overall education for our children and not on tax rates, county rivalries, or racial presuppositions. We make certain that our children have adequate housing and food by providing their parents with good jobs and affordable housing. We instill in our children the desire to dream and provide for them the opportunities to fulfill those dreams.

We have to work together to provide safe communities for our children here and around the world. No child should have to live with violence as a way of life. No child of God should ever suffer from intentional harm.

I have the privilege of taking each of our newborn children in my arms and introducing them to the congregation as I did earlier this morning. On your behalf, I welcome them to Lakeside and pledge that we will do our part to love them and nurture them in the Christian faith. It is a holy moment and a sacred pledge. If we are willing to hold our own children in our arms and protect and provide for them, can we do any less for the other children in this community? Is it not part of our calling as followers of the risen Christ to look after every child in this community . . . and around the world, for that matter? After all, is not the initial premise of scripture—of our faith—that we are all the children of God? How then can we turn our backs on a brother or sister in need, no matter how young or old? We pray each time we worship that “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” It is the calling of Christ to make his kingdom evident on earth, meaning that we are to live and act with the mind and heart of Jesus.

If other people are to believe in the resurrection of Christ from the tomb—if we truly believe that Jesus is alive—then it will be proved in the way we live. One way to demonstrate our faith is to hold our children and love them as Christ has loved us and gave himself for us . . . that we might all have life. Amen.

April 12, 2015

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Here we are, Lord, a week past another year of celebrating your resurrection from the tomb. Here we are, sometimes still wondering if it is all real, if you are alive, and if we are fully alive as well. Enter the closed doors of our lives and show us your woundedness as well as your vibrancy. Call our names and invite us to touch you and believe. Come into our midst and into our hearts and make us alive with you, we pray.

Like Thomas, may we be willing to speak our doubts and to seek assurance. Like him, may we be honest and trusting enough to risk appearing unfaithful in order to exercise our faith. And, like Thomas, once we have seen you, O God, may we be humble enough to bow in gratitude and awe before your redemptive love.

Once again we have brought arm loads of concerns and requests and placed them at your feet. There are so many people for whom we are concerned and so many needs that we want to see met. Move to meet these needs, we pray. Not simply because we ask, but because others are in need, please use the power of your mercy to bring healing and clarity, mending of relationships and the courage to let go, compassion and comfort, and forgiveness and grace wherever needed. And do not overlook the needs we ourselves have, even if not spoken or whispered, O Lord.

Bless us, we pray, your children who share this wonderful world you have given to us. Guide us as we care for it and for one another, for we do so in the name of Christ, the One risen and alive so that we might fully live. Amen.