



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

APRIL 21, 2019
RESURRECTION SUNDAY
SIGHT, SOUND AND SILENCE

A Joyous Sound
Luke 24:1-12; I John 1:1-4

Six weeks ago we began our Lenten journey with a baptism. It was not a routine baptism, however, it was the baptism of Jesus. Following the lead of the writer of I John, our intent was to pay attention to the ways we see and hear and touch God in our daily lives. Imagining what we might have seen and heard had we been there, we described Jesus' baptism this way:

We find ourselves on the banks of the Jordan, not a wide and mighty river as celebrated in so many songs; instead, it is more like a large stream, about a hundred feet across at its widest point. Today, however, something remarkable is happening. As we wade into the shallows, cool, salty water lapping against our ankles, a warm breeze offers a gentle massage on its way downstream. It is a cloudy day as we watch Jesus make his way into the middle of the river where his cousin John is baptizing people. After talking with John for a few minutes, Jesus leans back and disappears into the water. A gust of wind streaks down the valley as Jesus rises and the sun suddenly slices through the clouds causing the water streaming from his body to sparkle. There is a noise—some think it is thunder—but many claim it to be the voice of God who says, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." With the rest of the crowd, we stand still, silent, transfixed by what has happened. Jesus shakes the water from his hair, smiles, hugs his cousin, sloshes to the other side, and walks off into the wilderness.¹

Truly something remarkable happens with baptism. It is fitting, I think, that we celebrate this Easter Sunday with baptism as well. After all, baptism is a sign of our own personal resurrection.

Though thousands of miles and thousands of years removed from that initial baptism, Bo and Chase's experience today—just like each of ours—brings

¹Jody C. Wright, "Opening Ourselves to the Presence of God," March 10, 2019.

no less awe and wonder. In truth, there is no such thing as a “routine” baptism because every baptism is unique. Every baptism is remarkable. Every baptism is a sign to the world that this person claims his or her title as a child of God.

You may wonder, however, what happens when one of us is plunged beneath the water? We talk of baptism washing away our and I am reminded of that scene in the movie, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* when the three escaped convicts come upon a baptizing in the river. As a large group of people dressed in white move toward the water singing, “As I went down in the river to pray, studying about that good ol’ way, and who shall wear the starry crown? Good Lord show me the way!”², one of the men rushes into the water and is baptized. He comes out shouting to his friends, “Come on in, Boys, the water’s fine. The preacher’s done told me my sins is washed away!”

We know, of course, that the washing away of our sin is symbolic. The water itself does nothing to change us. It is just water, whether in a muddy river or a sanitized pool. The truth is that we should already be changed before we enter any waters of baptism. Baptism is a sign of what has already happened in our lives, the commitment to and profession of faith in God through Jesus Christ. Baptism is a signal to the world that we have given up our sins and given our lives to God. Baptism is a witness that we are followers of Christ.

There is something else very significant that happens to us in baptismal waters. We die. That’s right, we die. We say: “Buried with Christ in baptism, rise with him to new life.” As Christ died, so we die. In what way do we die? Obviously, because we are human, we will continue to sin. We will continue to make wrong choices. We will continue to need forgiveness, but we cannot be baptized every day in order to wash away those sins. Instead, we die with Christ. We die to living in such a way that our primary concern is for ourselves rather than other people. We die to a way of life that thinks we are self-sufficient and perhaps even a tad better than anyone else. We die to the illusion that what we do and how we live is our business alone and of no concern to anyone else, even God. We die to the easy reliance on law to guide our lives day by day. We die to the desire to sin and live contrary to God’s way in the world. We enter the waters of baptism . . . and we die.

Is that not why we are here today? We are all here because we die. I don’t mean the death that is inevitable for each of us, the death that will at

²“Down in the River to Pray,” African American Spiritual.

some point remove us from this earth, the death that takes our loved ones and everyone else away. We fool ourselves if we think we are here today as some kind of insurance against that kind of death. We are here because we believe that there is more to life than what we know here on earth. We believe that life continues after physical death in the full presence of God. We believe in eternal life.

We are here also because life gets gritty and sordid and messy at times. We are here because when we encounter Jesus, really get to know this One who is our Messiah, we want to die and be raised to live in a way consistent with the life of Christ.

We are here because Jesus died. A lot of things happened after his baptism—and not all of them pretty. He performed signs like turning water into wine and transforming a couple of fish and a handful of rolls into a feast sufficient to feed thousands of people. But such signs made people think Jesus was a rock star, a larger-than-life hero who could do anything—even take back their country from the hated Romans. Those ideas made the Jewish people hope for something Jesus was not going to do. Such ideas made the Romans anxious as well as the religious leaders who cozied up to them.

Jesus miraculously healed the lame, the blind, and lepers. He even raised people from the dead. Such divine power was frightening to the people in power on earth and led to charges that Jesus was a heretic, especially when he brought wholeness to someone on the sabbath. Jesus discovered that even miracles are suspect.

Jesus offered compassion such as no one had ever seen. A devout Jew, Jesus was brash enough to reach out to Samaritans and Gentiles without batting an eye. He befriended tax collectors and prostitutes. He stood up for women and insisted that their rights be protected. He welcomed children and suggested that the youngest and least experienced among us might just have a direct path to the heart of God. He criticized the wealthy for their love of money, the ultra-religious for their love of rules, the politically powerful for their love of advantage. His honest critiques, however, only earned him the ire of the wealthy, the ultra-religious, and the politically powerful people. Sometimes even compassion draws criticism and kindness leads to mockery.

Jesus offered a fresh understanding of God and God's relationship with his people. Instead of a remote and uninvolved ruler, Jesus lived as one of

us. Instead of a demanding and angry father, Jesus demonstrated the empathetic and understanding generosity of God. Instead of a vindictive deity who must be appeased, Jesus introduced us to a God who is willing to suffer and die rather than retaliate and destroy. Instead of a fickle creator ready to tear down and start over, Jesus unveiled a God who is willing to patiently redeem his creation one soul at a time. Instead of a god created in our image, Jesus held a mirror to his face and let us see ourselves in the glass. Sadly, there was no room for this kind of God in the hearts of some people so they killed the messenger who brought such heresy into their lives.

Jesus' signs, miracles, compassion, and fresh understanding of God did not sit well with many people and, as a result, he died. No angel armies were summoned to splinter the cross. No soldiers, scribes, or Pharisees were struck by lightning. No superpower transformation enabled Jesus to leap off the cross and crush his enemies. Instead, Jesus died. Because of all of the misunderstanding, arrogance, fear, and greed, Jesus died. He died.

When he died, his friends went into hiding while his enemies simply went about business as usual. Jesus looked like the fake and failure some people swore he was. When he died, the grit and grime of life settled over everyone like thick pollen on a spring day. When he died, it seemed all of his radical ideas about God died with him.

Then something amazing happened. When some of the women went to the tomb to prepare his body for a proper burial, they found the tomb open and empty. Two dazzling messengers reminded them that Jesus had told them he would be crucified but would rise again on the third day. How could they have forgotten something like that?! They ran to tell the other disciples who thought their story was nothing more than an "idle tale." After everything Jesus had said and done, why did they discount the most important thing he said he would do?! Finally, Peter ran to the tomb to see for himself. He didn't see Jesus, but we are told that he was amazed by what had happened.

John tells us that Jesus' dear friend Mary stood alone in the garden, heartbroken and weary. She heard someone and turned around to see a man whom she thought was the gardener. "I beg of you, please tell me where you have taken his body! Please, I want to take care of it in the proper way. Please tell me where it is!" The man said one word. One word. But to Mary it was the most joyous sound in the world. As he had done so many times over the years, the man said her name: "Mary!" Instantly she knew it was Jesus. Instantly she knew he was alive. Instantly she knew it was all true—the signs, the miracles, the compassion, the new understanding of God—all of it

was true because he was standing, alive and well, right before her. Jesus was alive . . . and so was Mary! Resurrection had a voice and the most joyous sounds came from it.

In baptism, we die to all of the ways of living that counter the life God wants us to have. In baptism, like Christ, we rise to new life! We are raised to be more concerned about others than we are for ourselves. We are raised to understand that we depend upon one another on our journey through life. We rise up knowing that how we live matters to one another and especially to God. And we rise to live by the tough and often problematic (but always redemptive) gift of grace. “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me,” the Apostle Paul reminds us. “And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2.20). We are raised from death to life to give signs of God’s grace to the world, to perform miracles in the name of Christ, to be compassionate toward one another, and to bear witness of a fresh understanding of God to a tired, jaded, weary, and often deaf and blind world.

Along the way, some people began to doubt that Jesus was actually human and that his experience mirrored our life in the world. To counter this misconception, the writer of I John said, “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.” Followers of Christ wanted to be clear that they had known the human Jesus and had experienced his divine redemption. They had seen him, heard him, and even touched him, making their understanding of his purpose clear and unmistakable. Other people could talk about what they had heard that Jesus said, his true followers could share what they had experienced with Jesus.

Baptism is a signal to the world that we have died with Christ. But more than that—much more than that—baptism is a joyous shout that we are raised with Jesus to a new life! The joy of Easter is that we are also resurrected to live!

Throughout Lent we sought to look and listen to all of the ways God is present and active in our world. We took time for silence so that we could fully appreciate the fullness of God in the world. But on this Easter day, on this day of resurrection—Christ’s resurrection and ours—the time for silence is over. Buried with Christ in baptism, we are raised with him to new life, full and complete! Christ is risen—Christ is risen indeed . . . and so are we! Thanks be to God! Amen!

April 21, 2019

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Like the Apostle Peter, we consider all that happened during the last week in Jesus' earthly life, and we are amazed, O God. A week ago we celebrated Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah but before week's end, we stood at the cross and watched him die. Honestly, we admit that like most of the followers in those days, there are times when we wonder if the things reported about Jesus are little more than idle tales. Then, like the disciples, we encounter the risen Christ in our own experience and we believe and we rejoice.

We thank you, O God, that you saw fit to return to life so that we also might have eternal life. We thank you that you willingly cast off the garments of divinity and pulled on the robes of humanity. We thank you that you humbly experienced our life so that we might better understand the enduring love you have for us. We thank you, O God, for raising Christ to new life and us along with him.

It is our prayer that we will fully appreciate this life that is ours and never take it for granted. We pray that we will understand that our redeemed life begins now and calls us to love you with all that we have and are and to love one another as you have loved us. May we sense the power of this new life today and may we find ways to share it even now.

The world has not yet embraced your resurrection, O God, nor has it understood the redemption available to us all. We pray that healing and wholeness of body, mind, and spirit might come to us all. We pray that hatred will end and hostility will cease. We pray that we will finally recognize one another as sister and brother and lay down our weapons to embrace one another in peace and love. For those of us who do believe, who accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, grant us the calling to share this good news in all that we do and say. Use us, O God, to make the Gospel known here and all over the world, to the glory of Christ, and for his sake and ours. Amen.