

Sermon for Morning Prayer: First Sunday after Easter

Today is the first Sunday after Easter. We have celebrated Holy week, looked inward during Lent and have celebrated the resurrection of our Lord. As I read the lessons for today and the prepared homily, I couldn't help but think of a movie I had recently watched and how it offered an unique perspective on the events after Jesus was buried in the tomb and what it means for all of us.

A while ago, our ministry team got together to watch the movie Risen. The movie follows the epic Biblical story of the Resurrection, as told through the eyes of a non-believer. Clavius, a powerful Roman Military Tribune, is tasked with solving the mystery of what happened to Jesus in the weeks following the crucifixion. He does this to disprove the rumors of a risen Messiah and prevent an uprising in Jerusalem. During a raid through a Jewish enclave, Clavius unexpectedly discovers a seemingly resurrected Jesus in a house with his apostles. Clavius calls off the search; he disperses his troops without revealing to them his personal encounter with the risen Jesus. Having abandoned Roman polytheism, Clavius later joins Jesus and his followers on a journey to determine the validity of his mortal salvation. In the last scene, after Jesus has returned to heaven in a burst of white light, Clavius acknowledges the life changing wisdom which he observed through Jesus, feeling he will never be the same.

In our lesson today from Saint Luke, the risen Christ appears to His disciples in His resurrection body. Even his disciples have trouble believing that it is really Jesus. Jesus says to them,

“Why are you troubled and why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet that it is I myself. Handle me and see.”

Jesus didn't wait for anyone to ask for proof or for certainty. The risen Christ, without being asked, immediately displayed the marks that identify Him as the very same person who had walked upon the earth, taught and prophesied, healed the sick, and was crucified and buried in Jerusalem. It left no doubt that he was Christ.

There have been those throughout history that claim that the figure of the risen Christ was a mass hallucination, a product of wishful thinking on the part of the disciples. There are others who have said that the resurrection of Jesus is just a symbolic way of saying that the spirit of Jesus lives on, after His death, in the hearts and minds of his disciples. Still others have said that Jesus is a generic savior, one among many in history, who represent in a timeless way the cycles of death and rebirth.

Our gospel, however, will not allow for any of these types of notions. The scriptures witness to the fact that the Christ whom we worship and serve is the same Jesus who walked the earth and died in ancient Israel.

The Gospel makes it clear that the material for understanding and interpreting Jesus comes from Jesus himself. He drew it from the Hebrew scriptures and not from gentile philosophers or poets. In the Gospel, Jesus refers to the things written about Himself in the laws of Moses as well as the prophets and the psalms.

After he has identified himself convincingly to the apostles, he "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" the same scriptures that St. Paul drew upon and referred to as he formulated his writings.

Jesus Himself showed how the Savior of the world needed to suffer, be killed and rise from the dead. He showed his disciples how His death and resurrection fulfilled the promise to Abraham and that all of the

world would be blessed through him. Also, he showed the disciples how they were to play a part in that great project and action of God.

Not only is the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith the same one we worship but the wounds that Jesus displays identify him as savior and Lord of all, the one who has authority over us. It is only after He has gone to the cross in obedience to God the Father and risen from the dead by the power of God that Jesus says in St. Matthews gospel

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

He has earned that authority through his incomparable sacrifice.

Why did God pick that particular time for Jesus to be born and for his death and resurrection? This question touches on what theologians have called “the scandal of particularity”. We could ask why that man and not some other? Why a man and not a woman? Why the Jews and not some other group? Why in that part of the world and not in another location. The answer to all these questions is what John Calvin called the “sovereignty of God”, or to put it another way, we do not know why.

Isaiah 55:8

“For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD.”

We might like to have a general kind of savior and a more general kind of religion, but that is not what the sovereign God has chosen for us. God has given us a religion based in history, which means there are specific times, places and people that are referenced. He has chosen to speak to us not through our imaginations but through our senses. He has chosen to present Himself to us in the person of the man whom we call Jesus.

Only this man. As Peter says in the passage from Acts;

“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we may be saved”

The same Jesus who once walked the hills of Galilee and the streets of Jerusalem presents Himself to us in the bread and the wine that we bless and share together in His name.

He says to us,

“This is my body. Take it. It is I myself.”

This same Jesus opens our minds, if we allow Him in, to understand the Old Testament scriptures as well. It is the name of this same Jesus that we are directed to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to every person and in every place. His presence among us is real and He directs us to be witnesses to that reality.

The scriptures witness to the power of this Man over sin and death. The scriptures witness to the fulfillment in Him of God’s promises to Abraham, Moses, David and Jeremiah. We too are all witnesses to His presence among us. We are witnesses to his power and direction in our daily lives just as the Roman Clavius was forced to abandon his old ways and rethink his life after being touched by Jesus.

St. John said, “That which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, that we proclaim to you, so that you may have fellowship with us and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”

We all share that fellowship. We have been baptized in the name of the Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit. We are all witnesses to the fact that the Jesus of Easter is the Christ of faith and that he dwells within us, He directs our lives and is here with us always.

To his unbelieving apostles, Jesus says:

“Why are you troubled and why do questionings arise in your heart?
See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. “

To all of us he says, “This is my body which is given for you. This is my
blood which has been shed for you. Take and eat. Take and drink. It is I
myself”.

To the only wise God our savior, Be glory, majesty, dominion and power
Both now and forever. Amen