

This Sunday's texts:

Acts 17:16-31

1 Peter 3:13-22

John 14:15-21

**Resurrection Power: Presence,
Hope, and Proclamation**

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The Holy Gospel for today comes to us from the Gospel of John, the 14th chapter: [Jesus said] If you love Me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever - the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see Me anymore, but you will see Me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me. The one who loves Me will be loved by my Father and I too will love them and show Myself to them."

The Gospel of the Lord. Heavenly Father, we ask this day that by the proclamation and hearing of Your Gospel, we might open our eyes to see Your presence and to be inspired by it. In Jesus' name. Amen.

In the days of Lent and now the season of Easter, we've been talking about the lifestyle of grace and the power of the Resurrection. We are trying to proclaim. We are trying in the proclamation of the Gospel to convince you that the power that raised Jesus from the dead is indeed the power of God that is at work in our lives by the presence and because of the promise of God. That continues as we look today at this idea of God's presence and the hope and the proclamation that are inspired by that Presence. I'm grabbing from the various three texts in a rather awkward, non-linear way today, so bear with me. All of these ideas are linked in these various readings, just not necessarily in order.

We begin with this fundamental idea of the Power and Hope that is within us. "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent."¹ It says in Acts 17, in this proclamation of Paul, to try to bring the Gospel to the Greeks in Athens. Then Paul says, "For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the Man He has appointed,"² meaning Jesus will be the judge of the living and the dead, as we proclaim in our Apostles Creed. "He has given proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead." The act of God's raising Jesus from the dead was the exclamation point. It

¹ Acts 17:30

² Acts 17:31

was the affirmation that indeed Jesus was the Messiah and that now Jesus would be appointed to be the One who sits at the right hand of God and judges the living and the dead, and judges us.

I just want to wonder, and I can't quite see in your eyes what you're thinking, but I'm wondering if anyone hears "judgment" in the notion that Jesus will be the one who *judges* us. Because in Christ, we should be encouraged that the very One who died for us, to bring us the forgiveness of our sins, to pay the price for our sins is, in fact, the One who will judge us. So we can have confidence when that Day of Judgment comes that we are in Christ and are forgiven and are assured of the forgiveness of Christ. Forgiveness is only as real as the Resurrection and that's why the idea of the Resurrection is so critical in our understanding, in our theology, as we look to what is the content of our faith. We believe that Jesus died for us and was raised again. We talk in the Apostles Creed that we believe in the resurrection of the dead. Now that doesn't just mean we believe in the resurrection of Jesus. It also means we believe that we too will be raised as He was raised, that as we are connected to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we too have that life, death, and resurrection in our experience. That's a part of our understanding of who we are or at least that's the faith that the Holy Spirit seeks to grow in us, as we walk with Christ, and as we walk in faith.

Listen to these words again from John 14 from this morning, "And I will ask the Father and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever - the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him, nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you."³ When we're talking about the power of the Resurrection at work in our lives, fundamentally we're talking about this text, this promise that God is with you. Now I don't know about you. There are occasions when my faith isn't at the forefront of my mind, when I simply forget that God is present. There are times when in my own striving and effort to do something, I think I'm doing it on my own. There are times in my depression when I think I'm alone and I'm the only one that has experienced the current heartache or struggle that is in my life. I hope some of you can relate. What I want to say to you in those moments is this. We have the promised presence of God with us and in those moments, a wonderful prayer to say is simply this, "Lord, open my eyes that I might see that you are here with me." That is the promise of God. We can be absolutely assured that that is the reality of our situation, even when our emotions don't support that idea.

³ John 14:16-17

We live life in His presence and that's why we can have hope. That's why we don't have to be afraid because the God of the universe, the God that understands all things, the God who loved us enough to die for us is present with us. When we are allowed to see, when, by faith, we recognize and claim that presence of God, it gives us peace. It reminds us that the current circumstances in which we are striving are not solely dependent on what we do, but are also immersed in what God does in, through, and for us. We experience peace in those moments of struggle, we trust in God and we ask afresh for God to let His power be in our situation so that we might rest in Him.

So we're talking today about this idea of Resurrection Hope. In the Scripture, throughout both the Old and New Testament, very often God's people, we are reminded to remember. Let me say that again, just in case you missed it. We're reminded to remember. That is, we look back over the Old Testament, over the life and teachings of Jesus, and we're asked to remember how God has been faithful. We're asked to remember how God showed up over and over and over again. When the people of Israel were in dire situations, God showed up and rescued them. We're reminded how God spoke through the prophets, to give a beat-up and oppressed people hope for the future and when God spoke through the prophets to remind people who were doing well and who were richly blessed to continue to give glory to God.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, a part of living in this power of the resurrection, a part of experiencing the hope that God has promised and will give us is to look back and to remember that our God is faithful. That's where you say amen. Amen means "it is so." Our God is faithful and as His people, we're called to remember that faithfulness. By the way, one of the great ways to remember that is not just to think about it, but to share it, to tell other people the stories of when God has been faithful in your life. That's what you call a witness.

So we can be encouraged by the past and God's faithfulness, but that's not the only thing. We're also told in Acts 17 that "in Him, we live and move and have our being."⁴ This is a powerful suggestion that if you're breathing, if you're aware, if you can move at all, that God's life is in you, that God is present for you. Now I wonder if, in a moment where you're living and moving and breathing, you might also be experiencing struggle and pain and hardship. Living in the present does not mean denying the reality of the present struggle, but rather embracing it, recognizing where we are, and remembering what God has done.

⁴ Acts 17:28

But then we move to this next idea, the idea that we are called, as it says in 1 Peter today, “in your hearts Revere Christ as Lord.”⁵ I don't know about you, but “revere” is not a regular part of my vocabulary. So I decided I would look up what does it mean to “revere.” I found out that many of the translations use a different word there, the word “worship,” the word “sanctify,” the word “honor.” This idea is that we are called as followers of Jesus, as those who have been saved by Grace, to honor and worship Jesus, and then look at the words, as Lord of our lives. So often, as we started in this sermon, we started with this idea that through the death and resurrection of Jesus, you are forgiven. That's an amen time. Amen!

But now we're reminded that as God's loved and forgiven people, we are to worship and honor Jesus as Lord of our lives, meaning He's going to give us purpose. He's going to give us direction. He's going to give us guidance, so that we have a sense of where we are to go, what we are to do in these circumstances in which we face. When we say we don't face the circumstances alone, we don't just mean that Jesus is there, although He is through the power of His Holy Spirit and the presence of His Holy Spirit. We mean that He will give us a sense of what to do, what are we to say, where are we to go, how are we to respond to these circumstances in our lives. The presence of God and the promptings of the Holy Spirit can give us a sense of direction.

By the way, one of the chief jobs of the Holy Spirit, who is present in our lives, is to remind us of what Jesus said and did. So a part of what we ask ourselves in those moments is what did Jesus do when he found Himself in these moments. How can I remember? How can I learn? How can I follow, as a disciple of Jesus to respond to these difficult circumstances in the way that Jesus did? Brothers and sisters in Christ, this doesn't just mean loving others which we know it does mean. It also means trusting in the Father. It also means remembering. It also means looking forward to the promise of the Resurrection, to the promise of eternal life, to the promise of that judgment of Jesus, which gives us entry with Him into heaven and eternity.

So this hope that can sustain us is in the very presence of God and it is in both remembering the past and with this anticipatory hope for the future, that is God's promise for us who believe and trust in Jesus. It's that past and that future which gives us gives us a sustained hope in this moment, in the present. So what do we do when we're struggling? What do we do when life is feeling blah? We

⁵ 1Peter 3:15

remember and we trust in the future to give us purpose and meaning in the present.

The other thing that Peter reminds us of here is these words, “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”⁶ As I was thinking about this sermon, as I was evaluating this sermon that I had prepared, it dawned on me that if I'm asking *you* to be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in you, perhaps I should give a reason for the hope that is in *me*. I started to feel convicted because one of you has said recently, “You know, Pastor, it would be nice if you put a little application in your sermon and not just taught about the truth of the scripture” and what I want to say to you is “I have already done that.” Did you hear me?

What is the reason for the hope that is in us? God has been faithful. That's the reason that we can have hope today because God has shown Himself to be faithful or if not that, at least we've remembered that God is faithful. Well, what other reason is there that we might have hope today in the midst of struggle? We are an Easter people. We are a people of promise. We are a people who have been joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus, so we know what our future holds. With the promise of God's faithfulness and the promise of our eternity, we are a people of Hope and therefore we live our lives with that reality of remembering and that reality of our promised future, impacting today, giving us strength and courage.

For the last several weeks we've been connected now with this incredible village in Chapa, Ethiopia, a village that has experienced incredible hardship with poverty and disease and a lack of resources for even clean drinking water and education, a village that has begun to experience in the last eleven years and especially last week an incredible sense of hope, as the people of God have acted in the promise of God, to bring them encouragement and provision. I want to say to you, brothers and sisters in Christ, this stuff I'm talking about this morning is not just between you and Jesus. It is between you and Jesus, but it's not just between you and Jesus. We are called to be the people of God, who remember and who have faith together.

One of the most poignant moments in my life - this is the Mother's Day point, by the way, even though I'm talking about my grandmother. So grandmothers in the house, remember that Mother's Day is for you too. One of the most poignant moments in my life was when it dawned on me after spending

⁶ 1Peter 3:15

the night at my grandmother's house and sitting at her little table where she always had coffee, toast, orange marmalade, and did her devotions out of *The Portals of Prayer* and prayed for me and my mom and my brothers and my uncle every morning. It was in the prayers of my grandmother that I realize that every day God was with me, if not based on my faith, based on hers. Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we find strength in the faithfulness of God and His promised eternity, let us share that as we live together, as God's people, as we remember to give the reason for the hope that is in us, as we live with Resurrection hope in our lives, as we live with the presence of Christ and His Holy Spirit in us and with us in every day in everything we do, as we live with Resurrection hope, we experience the power of God and we share that power of God as others see in you Jesus and the reason for your hope. Thanks be to God. Amen.