

Sermon for The Resurrection of Our Lord - Easter 2021

St. John 20:1-18, Isaiah 25, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Grace, Peace, and Mercy from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The one thing that jump out at me when pondering the texts for this Easter was the personal nature of the resurrection appearances to His disciples, those who had followed Him, and those whom He called to spread the Good News to others.

Mary Magdalene was the first person to whom the risen Lord appeared. And He appeared to her personally! This account is classic in its simplicity. It tells us that the resurrection of Christ is the most personal thing that can happen to anyone.

When we began to read about the risen Lord's appearances most of them were personal. Like in this morning's gospel to Mary, St. Paul brings this the person encounters home in our second lesson. He appeared to Peter, then the apostles, and next week we will hear how Jesus made it personal for Thomas. He appeared to James, and of course to St. Paul on the Damascus Road. He appears to two followers on the Emmaus Road. Only once did Jesus appear to a crowd at one time and that to 500 who saw Him. Jesus desired His resurrection power to personal and to have the power to change one's life from sadness, despair to one full of hope and faith. The Easter message has the power to change lives!

Through the years I have had conversations with people about their faith and relationship with the church. Oh, many tell me that do not go to church or even need the church, but they believe in God. They feel that they are good to go because all they need to do is live their lives the way God wants them to live. That is, treat everyone fairly, do not break the laws of the land, and be nice to everyone. In other words, to obey the Ten Commandments. All that is good, and many fine moral people live their lives in that way and appear to be just fine.

Some years ago, a seminary professor wrote a piece on salvation proposing two plans of salvation after the fall in the Garden of Eden. Plan A was to keep the Ten Commandments.

While we may feel like we can obey the Ten Commandments by following the letter of the law, how are we doing with the spirit of the law? Not so good if you use my life as an example. We can never truly live up to God's expectations when it comes to fulfilling the demands of His commandments. Though they are great rules for living, God's people who received them after their release from Egyptian slavery, were not able to live up to them either. They kept breaking them time and after time and again. So, the Professor's idea was when the Ten Commandments failed God went to plan B and that would Jesus.

Knowing that you can never keep the Ten Commandments would drive you Jesus. That may sound and there may be a grain of truth in this idea, but when you get right down to it, from the very beginning, from the foundations of the world God has had only one plan of salvation and it would come through one and only Son Jesus Christ. Even St. Paul lamented on his failure

to keep the law, "Wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of death!" Paul answers his own question, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ!" That is who delivers you and me from sin and death and the power of the devil. Jesus Christ and His atoning death on the cross and His resurrection! God gives to us the way to restore and experience relationship with Him. It is Faith in Jesus Christ. It is Jesus we all can personally experience the forgiving love of God!

A good catechism question is, how do we know that we have been forgiven by God? What makes forgiveness real? The Jesus on the cross dying a praying, Father, forgiven, for they know not what they do." And how do you know that God's forgiveness is more than Jesus' dying hope? The answer, "Because God raised Jesus from the dead! The greatest act of grace.! Nothing else can compare. It is God the Father's clear evidence that what Jesus said is eternally true. God was creating a marvelous new life, resurrection life, which can be yours when you are brought into a loving relationship with Jesus. It has transforming power.

A great archbishop told a story to a class of seminary students about a young man who care little about the church and even had a hatred toward it. One day he came to the church, not to pray, but to deliver a confession so outrageous that it would embarrass the priest hearing it. When the young man finished his confession and the priest wrote on a piece of paper and give it to the young saying, "Go and stand before the cross and then unfold the paper and read it." The young were not quite prepared to for what came next. But he did as the priest instructed. Looking up at the cross and Christ he unfolded the paper and read the words, "He die for you and you don't care one bit." The students sat in silence. Friends, the archbishop said, "I was that young man." Standing before the cross he had personally encountered the risen Jesus and his heart began to change.

It was impressive in that first Easter morning that risen Jesus spoke Mary's name. It was the only way she recognized her Lord. Jesus appeared to Mary personally, and spoke her name. No one ever had a personal relationship with the commandments or law. It is impossible to fall in love with two stone tablets. The Commandments make no claim on your heart and life. It has no power to change it. But with Jesus is different.

In the garden Jesus said, "Mary." He did not give her lecture on the meaning of the resurrection. He simply spoke her name. And she responded in the way she knew Him. "Teacher." Her encounter with the resurrection electrified her. Her relationship, which been broken by crucifixion, had been restored by His resurrection.

The last year has been a particular challenge in living out the personal nature of our faith in the community of Christ. The pandemic has caused separation from one another, even with worse case not even being able to see those you love. Personal relationship is the essence of Christianity. The Resurrection of Christ is the foundation of all our relationships, between one another and our Lord. Mary already had that relationship since Jesus had healed her from her many ailments. This act by Jesus had bound her to Him with hope and trust. This shown by the

fact that Mary was one of the last to leave the tomb on Friday and the first to visit the tomb on Sunday. Peter and John cannot lay claim to that. She was peerless in Her devotion. Now she is rewarded when the risen Lord re-established His relationship with her before anyone else. Christ always, with out fail gifts in beautiful and surprising ways.

Jesus spoke her name. When you breathe your last breath here on earth your name will be on your obit. Your name will be on the death certificate. Your name will be engraved on your tombstone. But here is the thing. More significant than all those name places are your name being on the lips of your Lord when He calls you from earth to heaven if you have repented from your sin and Trusted in Jesus as your savior and lived with Him relationship. As Jesus called Mary by name, He calls you too by name, first in the waters of Holy Baptism. And in just a few moments your name will be on His lips as we receive the meal of His body and blood. And Someday He will call your name as He welcomes you to the great and promised feast in heaven.

Christ is risen! What aa victory! Our names are called. Our Lord live among us! Hearts and stone being transformed for love alone! And someday we too will rise triumphantly! Christ is risen! Alleluia! Rejoice!