

Alleluia! Easter Sunday Alleluia! March 27, 2016
Sermon preached by the Rev. Daniel Vélez Rivera
Readings: Acts 10:34-43, Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24, 1 Corinthians 15:19-26, Luke 24:1-12

There is a story in Matthew's gospel (Mt. 10:7-8) that not only affirms the Resurrection stories of the three other gospels but that it invites the listeners to be people of the resurrection. Jesus gave his twelve disciples these instructions: "Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons".

Raise the dead? Did I hear that right? In my fourth year as a priest when I was still in Massachusetts, the youth group started a church community theater. One afternoon as the group we walked to a local museum to rehearse their first play, one of the youth found a dead bird on the sidewalk. She looked at me and asked if I would raise it from the dead. At first I thought she was kidding, right? But she wasn't. She knew this passage from Matthew and she wanted a miracle or some explanations. I explained to her as best as possible that I wasn't gifted like Jesus was, and that although I was a disciple of Christ's, I hadn't received that "gift", just like I didn't have the gift of acting, a talent that God had graciously given her! How did Jesus expect people two thousand years after his resurrection to explain why the average disciple, other than the ones who chose the vocation of medical care, can actually resurrect the dead. Does Jesus literally have this expectation of us?

I did some Bible research and I found that not only did Christ's disciples actually raise people from the dead but so did a couple of the Old Testament prophets. Let me give you a Biblical accounting before I move on to talk about Christ's Resurrection. There are ten resurrection incidences in the Bible. Of these resurrection accounts, three occur in the Old Testament: Elijah who resurrected the son of Zarephath's widow after she called him out on judging her a sinner (1Kings 17:17-24); Elisha resurrected the son of a Shunammite woman, a woman that he had prophesied would give birth to this very son years before (2Kings 4:35), and then during a hasty burial ceremony where the mourners cast the deceased into Elisha's sepulcher and the corpse upon touching the bones of the prophet Elisha was resurrected (2Kings 13:21). In the New Testament Jesus himself raised three people from the dead: the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:13-15), Jairus' daughter (Matthew 9:25, Mark 5:42, and Luke 8:55), and his friend Lazarus (John 11:43-44) the brother of Martha and Mary. Then there is the account of simultaneous resurrections that took place after Jesus surrendered his spirit on the cross and tombs were opened and saints arose (Matthew 27:52-53). Then there are the resurrections that Peter and Paul were responsible for that are told in Acts: Peter raised a female disciple called Tabitha (Acts 9:36-42) and Paul raised a parishioner of his after the guy had fallen asleep during the sermon (no joke), tumbling to his death three stories below (Acts 20:9-

12). Then of course, lest we forget the occasion we celebrate today, Christ's own resurrection which appears in all four gospels.

It is all well and good for the Old and New Testament prophets to resurrect people, and for Jesus the Son of God to be resurrected, but where does that leave us? As I told my young parishioner in Massachusetts, that gift was not in my bag of gifts and talents. So how does one justify Jesus' directives to his disciples? "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." As I contemplate these directives I can only imagine that Jesus was reiterating the two Great Commandments in a different kind of way. How else can any of us love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves if we weren't committed to visiting and caring for the sick with our prayers, our love, our meals, or our thoughts? Or by raising spiritually dead people to a new life in Christ when we share the Good News of Christ in our own lives with them through our faithfulness to God and one another? How else do we cleanse the lepers of our times if not when we aide the marginalized in our communities, being in solidarity with them in their oppression and societal rejection? Or by outing the demons that are like pied-pipers in our world – demons that turn moral values upside down and drive cultural and societal ethics into tailspins?

Christ came into the world, he died, suffered, was buried and resurrected so that you and I could make small differences in the world. We are directed to right wrongs, to embrace and not separate, to love the loveless, live righteously, show compassion even when we might not be given compassion, and lest we forget, to love and serve the Lord with our heads, hearts and souls. That's a tall order, but we don't have to do it all alone. Before our Lord died he had his disciples with him, and he trained them to go out in groups to support one another as they worked on his behalf. We see this right here at St. Gabriel's. A few of our parishioners were hospitalized last week, and they were visited, they received food, made to laugh despite the anxiety that their ailments produced. We sometimes overlook seeing the good deeds in the world around us because of all the negative news and horrific murders in some parts of the world, yet we have a man right here in Leesburg who after retiring offers small non-profits and churches free strategic planning consultation. Kurt Aschermann is helping our vestry as we speak to work with all of you so that together, in community, we can implement our first strategic plan for 2017. Additionally, there are some adult members in our Latino ministry and in the community who are illiterate or have at most an elementary school education and one of our new parishioners found out about it and decided to make a difference, she is teaching one person to read/write and another to work toward a GED in my office at 14 Cornwall Street every Monday at 6pm – these are examples of our solidarity, our love, our care, our faithful presence – our resurrection. We are a resurrection people!

On this Resurrection Sunday I invite you to continue embracing Christ's directives so that we can as disciples can help others become Resurrection people too. Blessings on this Holy

Day as you continue loving and serving the Lord in one another. We are resurrection people, go out into the world to love and serve! Amen