

Victory of God

Easter sermon at St. Peter's Episcopal Cathedral, Helena, Montana

April 1, 2018

In the name of the Risen Christ, Amen

Good morning and a Blessed Easter to all of you. On behalf of Bishop Brookhart and Bishop Gallagher, the cathedral staff, our chapter members and officers and myself, may I wish all of you a joyous Easter season. Easter Day marks the center of our faith.

Jesus resurrection is not an appendage to the Christians faith. It IS the Christian faith. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, we would not be here and the church would not be here. There would simply have been a dead Jesus and any movement around him would have ended with him. A dead Jesus would have had no power left to do anyone any good. Had Jesus' crucified body remained in the tomb, all the authorities had to do was produce his body and all this talk about an itinerant preacher rising from the dead would have ceased instantly. But the authorities, who were in charge of the body, could not produce it.

Was this talk of Jesus rising from the dead just a lie fabricated by Jesus' disciples, who stole the body and hid it somewhere? If so, would the disciples have proclaimed a lie and been willing to die for a conspiracy? Hardly likely! If this was a lie and a conspiracy, surely someone involved would have broken down under the pressure to save his own skin. But no one broke down. No followers confessed to a conspiracy. They all confessed to seeing Jesus alive. On most resurrection appearances there was more than one eyewitness at a time. That would defend against the charge that a solitary eyewitness was hallucinating. They all confessed to what they saw and heard, often at great cost from punishment and imprisonment to death.

We heard the resurrection account from the Gospel of John, where Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb in the early dawn while it was still dark. She sees the stone rolled away and runs to tell the disciples. Peter and John race to the tomb. Peter enters first. They are not sure what has happened, for as yet they did not understand the scriptures that Jesus must rise from the dead. John and Peter then return to their home.

But Mary stays at the tomb weeping. She looks in the tomb and sees two angels sitting where the body of Jesus had lain. She thinks that someone has removed the body. Then she notices a man who looks like the gardener, who, in fact, is Jesus. She asks him if he knows where Jesus' body has been taken. Then Jesus calls her by name and she recognizes him. 'Mary', Jesus says. How many times had she heard Jesus voice calling her by name?

Mary is the first eyewitness to Jesus after he has risen from the dead. In all of the gospel accounts, the first eyewitnesses are women. That is very important for us as believers. At that time a woman's testimony was not considered reliable in a court of law. What does that tell us? It tells us that all the stories we have of women as the first eyewitnesses, could not have been fabricated to suit the legal and cultural prejudices of the day. The accounts must be true as they were written and as they were handed down to us.

I could go on with more reasons to support the evidence for Jesus' resurrection, but that would be preaching to the choir. Instead, I want to tell a more personal story. It has been a joy to serve with you in this cathedral since last December and a privilege to get to know our bishop, Frank Brookhart. Last week, I learned something new about Bishop Brookhart, that we have in common. It turns out that Bishop Brookhart is.....a Los Angeles Dodger fan! I too am a Los Angeles Dodger fan. But my loyalty goes back to New York, where I grew up.

I am a **Brooklyn** Dodger fan! I grew up watching the Jackie Robinson Brooklyn Dodgers, with Roy Campanella and Don Newcomb, Pee Wee Reese and Gil Hodges, Carl Erskine and Duke Snider. Now please bear with me, I get excited when I get to include the Brooklyn Dodgers in an Easter sermon, but I have a connection to make. For nearly 10 years, in the 1940's and 50's, the Brooklyn Dodgers nearly always would make it to the World Series and then lose! Except in 1955, they won their only World Series in Brooklyn.

I have a video tape of the 1955 World Series in my video library. Whenever I feel down or get depressed, I take that tape out of my library and watch it. I watch it because the outcome is certain. It's guaranteed. The Dodgers win!

You see folks, because of what happened at Easter, God wins, guaranteed! The resurrection of Jesus Christ is 'The Victory of God' over sin, death and the devil, who is the author of sin and death.

The Victory of God was guaranteed on that first Easter Sunday. Since then, God in His mercy, has allowed the world to continue for 2000 years. Perhaps there will be another 2000 years or 10,000 or more. In that time there will be many battles between God and the enemy. Sometimes the enemy will win. Other times, our God will win. But the resurrection of Jesus guaranteed, not only the Victory of God on that first Easter Day, it guaranteed the victory of God at the end of time.

The Victory of God was not just a victory **from** sin and death. It was to save us **for** a new kind of life, here and now. Jesus' victory over sin was to save us from a life of shame, resentment and guilt. Jesus' victory over death was to free us from the fear of death. In his resurrection, Jesus not only defeated the author of sin and death, he gave us a new life to live, here and now.

God has a claim on each of our lives. We all have a calling to fulfill. We are all called to be members of a community whose job it is to continue the work Jesus did, to do the work we have been gifted to do and to give out of what God has first given us. We are what we receive.

Jesus' resurrection is more about how we live now than it is about some future reward. We have much life to live, much work to do and much love to give. Easter is about living with the assurance of God's forgiveness and the certainty that God is in charge of His world. God did not abandon his world to an enemy who would corrupt and destroy it. God would not give up on us. Instead, God came after us in the person of his own Son. He let the enemy do its worst to him by crucifying his Son. After that, the author of death was finished, but in Jesus' resurrection, the author of life made a new start.

Easter marks the victory of God. On this Easter, may we receive His resurrected life afresh and give out of what God has first given us, loving and serving others as God has first loved and served us. Amen

The Very Rev. Graham Smith, Interim Dean