

“Wisdom in God’s Creation”

Psalm 133 and Acts 4:32-35

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Last week we celebrated the resurrection, and this week we get a glimpse into how the news of Christ risen impacts his followers. One of the other texts for today that we did not read this morning is the story we know as Doubting Thomas. That story is probably more familiar to us, but the reading from Acts this morning gives us a glimpse of the community the disciples tend after their initial fear and confusion. Here we see a community so changed by their experience of the resurrected Christ that they radically change the way they live. In modern American Christianity we have a tendency to focus on what people believe about the resurrection- perhaps that is why we connect with the story of Thomas so much. The focus is more on the individual, and what they think. But the community in Acts demonstrates an answer to the question “How do you respond to the resurrection?” What does your belief and trust lead you to do. And for them the answer to that question is about the community rather than the individual and about the way they live and order their lives rather than about what they think. Their witness to the resurrection challenges our modern assumptions about what society and community could look like in a pretty radical way. It was pretty radical in their own ancient context too.

And if I'm honest, I've avoided preaching on this passage for a very long time because I am so very challenged by this witness to the resurrection! The idea of giving up all ownership of personal possessions and holding everything in common is to me both a beautiful and terrifying idea. Honestly, I don't even like sharing my favorite coffee mug with my own husband. This model of community feels so outside my lived experience, so outside what our society is, that it's hard to imagine it as a lived reality. Yet this way of living is consistent with Jesus' teaching.

Even today we talk about the community of the church as one body- radically connected and interdependent. And I truly believe we are one body and that it's not only a spiritual reality, but a physical, embodied reality.

This morning I'm not going to suggest that we just copy what the community in Acts did as we respond to the resurrection. Not only because it's hard, seems impossible, and I don't like sharing my coffee mug, but also because I believe a genuine response to the resurrection must be timely and contextual. It has to make sense for the community.

And even this community in Acts, which starts with so much promise living in the reality of the resurrection, finds itself subject to human fears and distrust.

The story that follows this passage and is not included in the lectionary is a passage about a man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira who sell their land holdings but keep back a portion of the profits for themselves, giving only some of the proceeds from the sale to the community. Somewhat mysteriously, when Peter calls this out, the man just dies, and later so does his wife. And as a result, we are told, "great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things."

How heartbreaking that this beautiful community is left in fear. The fear of Ananias and Sapphira that make them feel like they needed to lie, and the fear of the community in the wake of their deaths.

And yet, despite the fact that it wasn't perfect, that first bold witness to the resurrection still holds hope for us. It is the hope that in Christ we can reimagine our relationships with one another and with all of creation. And the question for us that emerges is:

"How does our community today respond to the resurrection?"

In other words

"How might we live differently, in ways that honor our profound connections with one another and with creation?"

The community in Acts lived the truth the saw revealed by the resurrection by giving up their personal property and living as one family, one body. As we recognize Earth Sunday this year I see the call for us to live as one human family as urgent and critical. In our own context environmental justice, and ecological work is not a secondary concern for the church, but a response to the resurrection.

In nature, we see revealed the type of interdependence that the community in Acts envisioned and lived. Ecosystems rely on all parts of that system, from fungi that help recycle dead plant matter and reintroduce nutrients, and pollinators, to trees and thorn

bushes that feed birds, and mammals, all parts of the system rely on each other, if one aspect of the system changes it will mean changes for all the parts. What I think we may conveniently forget is that we too are part of the system. As much as we have strived to control natural processes, we are still deeply reliant on the health and well-being of the natural world. This is why issues of climate change are not only issues in the world of environmentalism. They are humanitarian issues, economic issues, medical issues- the health of our planet is connected to the health and well-being of all people and all plant and animal life.

Christ called us to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves, he revealed that in Christ we are one body. The community in Acts was moved to live as though this were true in the here and now- as though the Kingdom was present now, though not fully realized just as Jesus taught. In our own time and context working for a healthy planet is a way of living that recognizes that we are one body. That work will also call us to radically reorder the way we live, we will need to live counterculturally being willing to consume less in a society that thrives on selling us more, to share more resources when our lives are ordered so much toward the individual, to choose to put our time and energy in different places.

If we, like the community in Acts, wish to respond to the resurrection in a way that recognizes the body of Christ and the wholeness of creation in the kingdom of God, then we must also reckon with the way our current lives fail to honor that wholeness. We will not do it perfectly. Like the community in Acts we too will fail at realizing that wholeness, but it is an act of faith to continue any way.

This is a sermon about how we live and what we do because of what we believe. So I will leave you with a challenge. I want each one of you, and I will do this too, to pick one thing in your life that is doable and manageable that you could change that would be beneficial to the environment. I encourage you to start small because if it's a manageable change you're more likely to keep doing it and because when you start to make small changes and they work out, in my experience you'll find it snowballs! You could choose to eat less meat or go vegetarian for a time to see what it's like. You could choose to drive less if that's possible for you. You could choose to mow your lawn less, or plant some native plants like the ones discussed in Adult Forum this morning. You may choose to avoid single use plastics, but bringing a reusable cup with you when you go out. Whatever you choose to do may it be a joyful response to the resurrection of Christ and may you remember that it is an act of love for all people and all creation in the Kin-dom of God.