

John Sampson  
"The Logic of Resurrection"  
Text: Acts 4:32 - 35  
Preached at KVCC  
April 8, 2018

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

Phew...

That was a lot!

I don't know about you, but the last couple of weeks have been really busy in the life of our church, and maybe also in your individual lives.

We've had Lenten Bible studies, weekly worship, and last week, during Holy Week, we had a Maundy Thursday dinner service, and a Good Friday service. Then came our celebration of the resurrection with three Easter services, one very early in the morning and outside in the cold rain!

It's been a wonderful journey, and I'm so glad we got to share it together as a community of seekers.

But I'll tell you. I was exhausted on Monday. Kevin kept asking me if I wanted to do this or that, and I kept replying "no." It was my plan to stay at home, never get out of my jammies, and watch some bad, mind-numbing tv. I needed a day to just decompress after a busy, busy Lent and Holy Week.

Perhaps some of you felt the same way. I've been talking about the services and events at our church. But you may have also had family commitments, dinners to attend, and relatives to visit, or who visited you.

With all of the busy-ness that came with our preparations and celebrations of Easter we may not have had the time to actually take a moment and think about all that we just experienced from a spiritual perspective. We may not have taken a spiritual day off, to stay in our metaphorical jammies, and soak in the deep and complex meanings of the season.

But here's the good news. We're about to slow it down, take a breath, and reflect on all that's just occurred. That's what this time after Easter – called Eastertide – is structured to do. It's going to give us the rhythm and the stories, the hymns and the prayers to consider the meaning of the terrible events of Holy Week, and create

the space where we can come into intimate contact with the wonder of Jesus' resurrection.

So take a deep breath.

Relax.

And gift yourself the stillness of heart, and of mind, and of spirit that will allow you to open yourself, and engage with the challenges of Holy Week, and the miracle of Easter.

So let's begin.

On this first Sunday after Easter we hear a story, not of Jesus, but of his early followers. Time has been fast forwarded, and we join the action a couple of months after Jesus has been resurrected, and has ascended into heaven. I chose this story, out of all of the options

that the Lectionary provided, because I think it echoes where we find our selves today. For the followers in our story, and for us here this morning, Jesus has left the stage. He's no longer physically among us. Instead of Jesus in the flesh, we have stories about his ministry, and his example. And just like those early followers, we're trying to figure out how these stories might be applicable to our own lives.

And boy oh boy do our first century spiritual ancestors look into the accounts of Jesus' life that have been shared with them and respond radically. We're told that they create a commune, a social organization in which all property is held in common, and in which people sell their belongings, donate the money to the commune, and distribute the proceeds to all in need. I call it a commune, but I could also call it a church. This is a story that shows us that living into Jesus' example can have profound, and possibly disturbing

implications for our lives, and for the communities we create for ourselves.

A sense of how disturbing this image of an early Christian commune can be for those of us raised in capitalistic America, in a nation that spent decades fighting and resisting nations that claimed to be communist, can be seen in the biblical commentaries written about this passage. Over and over again academic luminaries from our nation's best seminaries make it a point to say that this story of a community founded on the sharing of goods never happened. They say it's only an idealistic projection back in time by the writers of the book of Acts imaging what those early Christian communities might have looked like. They say that this story of an economic model, which is founded on the redistribution of wealth, can't be descriptive of the truth. For the great biblical commentators of our time it is easier for them to say that a man was raised from the dead, than it is for them to believe that humans could create a society

where there is no need, and no want, and where all are equally valued in our diversity.

But regardless of the anxieties this story of communal Christianity might raise for our great commentators, I think it's more important to try to understand how we get from Jesus to a commune. What's the bridge between the two?

We might assume the image of a community based on sharing came from the beatitudes where Jesus told us that the poor are blessed.

Or maybe it came from Jesus telling the rich young man that it would be easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than for him to get into the kingdom of heaven. Or maybe it came from Jesus' example of feeding the thousands with just a couple of fish, and a few loaves of bread.

But that isn't what our text tells us this morning.

It tells us that right in the middle of that early commune, right in the center of its members sharing their resources with each other so that no one was in need, were the apostles preaching about the resurrection. It is the resurrection of Christ, and I think the stories leading up to it of his arrest, torture, and execution, that radicalized his followers. It is the story of the birth of new life after the coming of death that challenged his followers to turn the economic practices of their own society upside down, and create something new. It is the power of Lent and Easter, the power of experiences like the ones we have just celebrated in this very community that revolutionized our spiritual ancestors.

And so, on this Sabbath, on this spiritual day off, as we sit in our metaphorical jammies, let us take another look at our celebration of the resurrection, and the events that led up to it. And let us see if we might just be radicalized like those early followers of Jesus.



When I first read the passage from Acts we heard this morning I was struck by the language of the opening sentence. It says, “those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.” This is the statement that gives our great biblical commentators palpitations, and shudderings, to paraphrase Mrs. Bennet from Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*.

Think of something you possess that you would find easy to give up.

Maybe it’s a pencil. You might say to yourself I could give that up, I could hand it over to others, no problem.

Fair enough.

Now think of something slightly more difficult for you to donate to our community.

Perhaps it's your old laptop, but you needed to replace it anyway.

Now keep ratcheting up this fantasy where you imagine yourself releasing more and more of your possessions, and their value to you keeps increasing.

Imagine letting go of your sofa, then the trophy you won for being saleswoman of the year, then your car, and your house, and the retirement account you worked decades to create and manage, the account that allows you to finally live here, in this valley, among these mountains. How difficult would it be for you to give up all of these things? I know from my own life, and my feelings about my possessions, it would be pretty darn difficult for me to give everything I owned away.

But this is where our commentators end. Their anxiety begins and ends with stuff.

But the story of Holy Week and of Easter, the story of Jesus' final days, pushes us beyond stuff.

It pushes us to the very core of our understanding of what private ownership means. We are pushed into ourselves, into our self-images, into our beliefs about our control over our own bodies, and our very right to live. We are pushed to consider relinquishing our most private and intimate possessions. Holy Week and Easter push us to let go of nothing less than ourselves.

Think about what we experienced last week during Holy Week.

For those of us who were at the Maundy dinner service we remembered, and then enacted, the moment when Jesus knelt before his disciples, and washed their feet. We experienced how Jesus emptied himself of his teacher's privilege, of his authority, of his self-respect, and took on the role of a servant, and washed his followers' feet. And we did the same for each other. At that moment we gave up more than a pen, or money. We gave up a piece of our own self-understanding, possibly our own self-respect.

Then on Good Friday we heard the words Jesus spoke in the garden of Gethsemane. We heard how Jesus told God he would rather not be arrested and tortured, but that he would submit and follow the path before him, wherever it led. In that moment we saw Jesus give up possession of his future, and of his sovereignty over his own destiny.

And before Pilate we saw Jesus go silent and refuse to argue and beg for his freedom. In that moment Jesus gave over his body and his life. He saw that they were no longer his possessions.

In the experiences of Holy Week, and then of Easter, we see God revealing a truth to us. Those things we believe we own, and possess, are not really ours. Instead, ownership is a fantasy that can block us from an unexpected grace, from a moment that offers the possibility of new life, and transformation.

Jesus empties himself, he teaches us and invites us to empty ourselves, not because we live under the dominion of a cruel God who demands blood, but because of our brothers' need, and the want of our sisters. We are asked to give up ourselves, and our possessions in the most radically fundamental way, so that we may offer each other the resurrection of our communal body, which is

the body of Christ here and now. We are asked to give up ourselves for each other. And this is nothing less than what we call love.

This is the message and teaching that lies at the base of Holy Week and Easter. It is because of this that the apostles sat in the middle of that early Christian commune and didn't teach the beatitudes. They taught the resurrection stories.

And in our lifetime we have also had leaders that teach us the logic of resurrection through their words, but also through the way they live their lives.

This past week we acknowledged the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. a man deeply touched by Jesus' experiences of his final days, and of the promise of Easter and the resurrection. I think King was a man who understood the logic of these stories, because you can see how he lived a life where he

was consistently fighting to let go of the possessions of his own value, of his own self-image, of the possession of his destiny, of the autonomy of his body, and of his life. And he gave over all these things not just because of the need of black Americans, but of the need of all Americans. He gave over these things out of love.

Hear the words of his final speech again. Hear them as teachings of resurrection. Hear them as echoing the commitment of our spiritual ancestors to one another. Hear them as an ongoing invitation to each one of us to live into love more deeply and more profoundly – with less self interest, and less possessiveness.

We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter to me now, because I've been to the mountaintop.

And I don't mind.

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!

And so I'm happy, tonight.

I'm not worried about anything.

I'm not fearing any man!

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!!

Happy Easter! Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Amen.