

LELC Epiphany 6

Some weeks the lectionary is quite the puzzle to me – trying to figure out the why and the how some texts have gotten stuck together. That's true this week for sure. This whole Epiphany season we have been working out way through selected bits of Paul's first letter to the fledgling Christian community in Corinth. Today's text is all about the resurrection of Christ. We'll hear it again come Easter.

If you want to know the truth though, preaching the resurrection is a bit of a puzzle too; especially if one tends more toward prophetic preaching – the stuff about loving our neighbor in the here and now. So much of the history of Christendom had included the de-emphasis of living out God's love, living the Kingdom of God here and now. Instead the powers that be have sought to emphasize believing in Jesus as only being about going to heaven when you die.

In some strains of Christianity, that is what is preached almost to the exclusion of anything else. That is called the exclusivistic salvific effect of Jesus. (Big 10-dollar word I learned in seminary) As if that is the one and only thing that ever matters. Imagine my delight when I learned another 10-dollar word: realized eschatology, that basically said Jesus' life and death was not just about the end of life or the end of human history, but it is realized right here, right now in how we live it out today.

But then, what does one do with texts like I Cor 15? I know there are plenty of preachers who can preach this text with conviction and passion. I'm just not one of them. Check out those last few verses (v. For if the dead are not raised..... in fact Christ has been raised.) I'm not a mathematician, but I do know a little bit about logic and this is just a combination of circular logic and truth by assertion. Not usually the stuff that holds a lot of water.

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Not just a
word from
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I'll tell you what I do know though. I know that I now proclaim Christ risen from the dead – not because my Sunday School teacher said so, or because my Confirmation pastor said so, or because my favorite seminary prof said so – I proclaim Christ risen from the dead because I have experienced the Jesus alive in my own life. I recognized that presence of Christ because of those folk's witness to their experiences. That is true. But to know it, to be able to tell others of it, I have needed to experience it myself. I have come to know Christ alive in my life, decisive and defining for my existence.

And I can believe that Jesus' resurrection was the first fruits because I have experienced resurrection in my own life. When life has seemed dead and gone, over, kaput! God has raised up for me new life, new energy, and new possibilities. My mourning was turned to dancing, my emptiness and longing was filled.

I suspect that is partly why Paul, in his letter to these Christians of Corinth, chose to end his letter to them with a discussion of resurrection. Pretty much the whole letter is about divisions, conflicts between them, fights over marrying and sexual morality, over lawsuits, over what to eat and when to eat it and over who was the most spiritual, the closest to God. If people then were anything like people now, you gotta believe that some weren't talking to each other anymore. Some had gotten mad and left. And there wasn't another community of Christ followers just around the corner. Paul didn't want their divisions over those issues to be the end of their community in Christ, their connection to God's love through Christ. So Paul speaks of resurrection, the promise of life raised up from the dead.

*over
done!
kaput!*

When God raised Jesus from the dead, God said, of the despair and brokenness of Christ on that cross, "I'm not letting the story end there." And the same is true for us, for our stories, God does not let it end at the part that feels "over, done, kaput!" God does not let our sinfulness, our broken-ness, our finite capacity to act with love, be the end of the story. If it were, we surely would be the most to be pitied.

But my story, and maybe your story, and the stories of our forebearers in faith tell us again and again and again, that God does not leave us there. God calls us from death to life. God raises us up from the limits of our finite selves, our limited worldviews, and our bondage to ego. God gives us the promise of renewed life now and eternal life in the life to come.

Going to heaven when you die was never the goal of early Christians, But it was the springboard that made them fearless in the face of any rejection or persecution. They knew to the core of their being that no matter what happened because of their living out of their faith in Christ Jesus, God would have them. They would be with God. I think Paul sets the discussion of this promise at the end of his letter to their divided community as a reminder that God would raise up their community too. God would restore the hurting, dying parts of their community to life too. And God did – else we wouldn't have their story.

This community, Lake Edge Lutheran Church, is going through a tough time. There are divisions. ^{Feels over, done, kaput?} But some can tell the stories of how God has seen this community through tough times before. And because resurrection of every sort is our in Christ, we can trust that God will see this Community through tough times again this time. One never knows what the resurrected life will look like. I've seen God's handiwork in communities often enough to trust that whatever happens, it will only have been possible because you have traveled the path you have so far. You can trust that whatever God is up to, it will bring about a community that is re-united and re-invigorated for the fuller living of the Kingdom of God, for bolder living of God's love for all people, and for fearless standing with the hungry and poor. In Christ, resurrection is promised to you as a community and to each individual that has been part of this community.

We know that Christ is raised. And that makes all the difference. That means we can face what feels over, done, kaput! knowing that God isn't finished yet. My prayer for us all is that, for today at least, that promise can be enough. Amen.