

Again and Again

Wayne Waibel – 04/07/2024

The paschal mystery, the death and resurrection of Christ, is the centerpiece of the Christian faith, and the liturgical year devotes seven weeks to the Easter season, culminating in Pentecost. Importantly, the Sundays of this season are referred to not as Sundays **after** Easter, but as Sundays **of** Easter.

Sundays fully shaped and embedded in the Easter gospel. For fifty days, the church lives into the reality of the resurrection, of what it means to be a community shaped by the dying and rising of Christ – by the expectation-shattering reality of life victorious over death.

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But first we have these scared little disciples huddled in a room behind locked doors trying to survive. They are afraid of the Jews – which in this biblical context refers primarily to the church rulers – not the entire nation of Israel. This fear is justified because they are the prime suspects regarding the missing Jesus.

Even though Mary Magdalene has imparted her witness of the risen Lord – they do not believe. We have to remember they are still disciples (those who follow), not yet having been elevated to the role of apostles (those who are sent).

And the bad rap that has followed poor Thomas is completely contrary to the reality of the situation. When he expressed doubt in the witness of his fellow disciples, it was no more or less shameful than the doubt they showed in Mary’s account of the risen Lord.

It’s noteworthy to consider that the exchange between Jesus and Thomas was one of invitation, not castigation (“see and believe”). Plus, after having Jesus in their midst – He finds the disciples eight days later in the same room behind the same locked door – still frightened and confused.

After having been filled with the Holy Spirit, and commissioned to spread the gospel to the “ends of the earth,” they are still cowering in fear. So, let’s give Thomas a break.

This episode from John serves to remind us that in the wonder of His wounds, Jesus still finds us. Jesus comes again and again to this petrified group of disciples, much as He visits us – again and again.

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The church's mission is rooted in and grows out of the fundamental imperative to care for one another. Easier said than done. Still – as Christians, what we **say** should correspond to what we **do**.

The thing that most gets in our way is wealth. Both the accumulation of it and the drive to attain it. Wealth so easily takes our mind off God and weakens faith.

Unity in the midst of diversity and generosity in the midst of poverty. That's our charge, our mission, our opportunity to make a difference.

That's the kind of calling that can reveal the light of God, opening entirely new vistas to us, and to those whom we touch. We must be ever mindful of those who lean on us – especially those in the margins that are for the most part, invisible.

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“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” So declares the author of First John. This epistle will occupy our readings for the next six weeks. It is unlike the other two epistles of John in form, focusing on sin, as opposed to the formal beginning, middle and end of the traditional letters.

What the author of this epistle is trying to express extends so far beyond the reach of ordinary language. Confession involves not only a wiping away of the old sins, but the establishment of new righteousness.

You'll hear the phrase "My little children" regularly, and while sin is the focus, grace is the emphasis. What will become more prevalent is not how God's anger must be assuaged, but our rebellion against God.

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"As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." That is the charge to all disciples who would be apostles. A remarkable fusion of purpose, direction, and compassion. How do we even come close to fulfilling that command?

The short answer is that we do not. Not of our own volition. But we have an advocate in the form of the risen Lord. His victory over death in His time has enabled us in our time to continue the mission. To share the good news to the ends of the earth.

When doubt crowds out hope, we can be confident that Jesus will come to meet us where we are, even if it is out on the far edge of faith that has forgotten how to believe.

For we are an Easter people blessed with the capacity to live into a life we could not possibly live were it not for a cross, and a servant who humbled Himself despite His great power.

And the result of His victory over death rests in our hearts as we realize that we are not alone but have in fact – always been – already found – again and again. Amen.