

The Resurrection Sermon

Second Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, ... ²² "You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— ²³ this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. ²⁴ But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. ²⁵ For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;

²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope.

²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption.

²⁸ You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'

²⁹ "Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.'

³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses."

"When did God become more than a name to you?" This is one of the "Quaker Questions" often used as an icebreaker in church groups. A follow-up question would be, "When did Jesus become more than just a name to you?" The name may be one you grew up hearing as part of your daily life from your parents and/or grandparents, or perhaps it was only mentioned in the midst of all the secular festivities of Christmas and Easter. Whether by gradual understanding or a lightning-bolt moment, somewhere along the way your spirit awakened to the truth

that Jesus is more than the name of someone who lived a couple thousand years ago.

It is one thing to hear the names bandied about in conversation, but quite another to understand that God and Jesus are far more than just names. Indeed, when Moses asked God to provide a name, God was hesitant. God did not wish to be condensed into one small word. In truth, God *cannot* be defined merely by a few consonants and vowels. At some point in our lives, God becomes personal.

In the second half of Acts 2, Peter speaks to a crowd of people gathered in the holy city of Jerusalem. It is the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit that Jesus had promised before his death arrives full-force in tongues of fire and in the tongues of all the languages represented by the multitude of folks in earshot and beyond.

Pentecost was one of the pilgrimage festivals, so Jews from many nations had gathered from as far away as 1,000 miles. So many of the Jews to whom Peter spoke had not been eyewitnesses to Jesus' life and death. They may never have even heard of Jesus of Nazareth. Others had been in Jerusalem at the time of Christ's crucifixion, death, and resurrection, but they struggled with the consequences of these life-altering events. To them, Jesus was a name, but so far, no more than that.

"All of you listen up!" Peter says. "This Jesus, whom you crucified, is more than just a name. He is more than a prophet and a good man. He is the Messiah, the Holy One proclaimed by David and our other prophets. This is the Savior for whom we have been waiting for generations. Every single one of you is a witness to this truth. Whether you saw Jesus with your own eyes or are now hearing the good news for the very first time, you are a witness to what I am telling you today." **Kathleen Long Bostrom**

For Peter and the eleven, the resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of Christian faith. Paul later says that without the resurrection, both his preaching and our faith are in vain (1 Cor. 15:14). For the early Christian community, everything depended on the resurrection, for it was the foundation of their proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ. So, as Paul says, if Jesus was not raised from the dead, then our faith is in vain.

There is a distinction between resuscitation and resurrection. Lazarus was resuscitated; Jairus' daughter was resuscitated; the widow of Nain's son was resuscitated; their bodies were reanimated for a period of time, only to die again. However, Jesus was resurrected and still lives! Jesus was raised from the dead; and his resurrection becomes for Christians the opportunity for a new and transformed life in God, and life in the age to come.

The Gospels tell us that there were some questions as to what really happened to the body of Jesus; some even suggested that it was stolen (see Matt. 28:11-15). The shorter ending of Mark leaves the whole story in question, not only because do we not know what happened after the resurrection, but also because those who were at the tomb fled in fear and terror.

But Peter asserts that it was God who raised Jesus from the dead (v. 24). This assertion by Peter is the proclamation of the community and foundation of our Christian faith. Jesus was handed over to those who were outside of the law, the Romans, and crucified, "But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power" (v. 24). That God raised Jesus from the dead is the essence of the community's proclamation because it stresses a continuity of events. The Jesus who was from Nazareth, who lived and taught in the region of Galilee, and who was crucified and buried in Jerusalem, is the same Jesus who was resurrected and appeared to the community. The pre-Easter Jesus of Galilee is the post-Easter Jesus.

Some groups argued that Jesus did not have a physical body and could not have actually died, that his death was merely an appearance, a kind of first-century bodily illusion. However, the Gospels are clear that Jesus was a physical human being; in fact, it was precisely his humanness that brought contention among the Pharisees. Consistently in Luke the Pharisees charged that Jesus ate and drank with sinners. John makes a point that the resurrected Jesus not just appear to the community, but eat and break bread with them. This Jesus who was physically with the community pre-Easter is the same Jesus who is with the community post-Easter. They believed this and Peter proclaimed this, as his proclamation shows that it was God who raised Jesus from the dead.

Because God raised Jesus from the dead, Jesus' resurrection becomes the confirmation of his earthly life. In Jesus' resurrection from the dead, God confirmed Jesus' earthly ministry: his works and deeds, his teaching and authority. In raising Jesus from the dead, God confirmed that Jesus was sent by God to perform miracles—to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, raise the dead—and to teach with authority.

This confirmation would also extend to the ministry of the disciples, as exhibited by Peter and John in Acts 4. Not only did God confirm Jesus' ministry; God also vindicated Jesus' innocence of the charges against him. You remember the trial and how Jesus was condemned for two claims made by Jesus about himself, the first having to do with his application of the divine Name to himself, and the second having to do with his identity as the Son of God, the King of the Jews.

Jesus had used the Name “I AM” when He said:

“I am the bread of life” – John 6:35, 41 2.

“I am the light of the world” – John 8:12, 9:5 3.

“I am the door of the sheep” – John 10:7, 9 4.

“I am the good shepherd” – John 10:11, 14 5.

“I am the resurrection and the life” – John 11:25 6.

“I am the way, the truth and the life” – John 14:6 7.

“I am the true vine” – John 15:1, 5

At his trial before Pilate He was asked: "Are you the King of the Jews?" (John 18:33). His answer was important because according to 2 Samuel 7:14: The King will be a Son to God, and God will be Father to the King. Jesus had said earlier: "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30). But the Pharisees said that Jesus cast out demons by the ruler of demons (Matt. 9:34). Jesus was charged at trial with blasphemy and was executed by the Romans as a state criminal. By raising Jesus from the dead, God proved that these and other charges were false. God also proved that Jesus was not just a prophet; good man, a kind of noble teacher, but was indeed the Christ, the anointed of God.

In this confirmation by God we begin to see the early church's development of their understanding who Christ is. Because God raised Jesus from the dead, we see the movement from the pre-Easter Jesus of Nazareth to the post-Easter Christ. Prior to the event of the crucifixion, Jesus was a Galilean who preached, taught, and performed miracles. After the resurrection, he is referred to in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles as the Christ. The early community saw in Jesus the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament and the fulfillment of Israel's calling by God to be a holy people wherein God would establish God's reign forever. So the proclamation of Jesus as the Christ is the church's own assertion that Jesus is the promised of God, the one in whom these promises are fulfilled, and the one in whom resides the promise of a new age to come.

In this sermon of Peter we can also see the early formulations of what would become the church's early creedal statements. Peter says in verse 25 that David had spoken of Jesus and in verse 30 that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise that the

Messiah would be a descendent of David and sit upon his throne. Therefore, Jesus' death and resurrection fulfilled the Scriptures.

C. H. Dodd shows this with reference to the preaching of Paul. Dodd outlines what he calls the Pauline apostolic preaching that Jesus is the Christ: that Jesus was the seed of David, died and resurrected according to the Scriptures, and exalted at the right hand of God. This teaching is also seen in the early affirmations of Ignatius of Antioch and Justin Martyr, and it carries forward into the later more familiar Apostles' and Nicene creeds. These affirmations have their origins in the sermon of Peter and the early proclamations of the community. **Reginald D.**

Broadnax

In my own faith tradition, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), our affirmation of Faith says it like this: We confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and proclaim Him Lord and Savior of the world.

Let Jesus be more than just a name to you, Peter says. Let Christ be your Savior. Hear with your heart as well as with your ears. Then you can proclaim Jesus as Lord and know the joy of Christ's amazing, saving grace.

The question to ask, therefore, is not simply, "When did Jesus become more than just a name to you?" but rather, "How is Jesus more than just a name to you now, in this moment, at this time in your life?" It is a timeless question that bears asking time and time again. **Kathleen Long Bostrom**

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