

The Reverend's Ruminations

"Well, I'm glad that's over!" *That* was WINTER; and what a winter it was!?! Now that the snow is miraculously disappearing (disappeared?), creatures great and small seem to have a different outlook—and all seem to be leaning wholeheartedly into SPRING. When we started our Lenten journey back at the beginning of March, it wasn't hard to be in a somber, reflective mood. The shorter winter days seemed to be dragging on forever, and we had even cancelled our last Sunday worship service in February because of yet another round of blowing and drifting snow. Now that Daylight Savings Time has kicked in and the robins have returned, perhaps you've found yourself making mental preparations for planting, fertilizing, cleaning, and events like confirmation or graduation.

One of the biggest Sundays of the Christian year is also on the horizon: EASTER! This year Easter falls on April 21st, calling us to hear once again the story that unites Christians throughout the world—the resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ. But before that bright and joyous day, there are still three weeks of Lent, including those fateful days of Holy Week observed as Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Many of us would rather gloss over the ridicule, pain, and suffering that Jesus endured during his final days in Jerusalem, choosing to focus instead on the glory of his Easter triumph over the grave—or even speaking of him as if he never died at all.

It's not unlike the way many of us would rather skip the mud, flooding, and inevitable rainy, windy days of early spring and jump right to those elusive calm, sunny, 70-degree days of later spring/early summer with their green grass, budded trees and flowers, and happily chirping birds. But despite such dreams, we know that the change of seasons is a longer, messier process than we'd like to admit. As we do look ahead, I invite you to consider some fresh insight on Christ's resurrection from a brief commentary I was just reading about Easter morning's epistle lesson from 1 Corinthians 15.

In this section of his letter, Paul spends quite a bit of time addressing some of the Corinthian congregants' doubt in the truth of the resurrection, as well as their fear about what may have happened to those who have died before the return of Christ. For Paul, and us as Christians, the resurrection of the dead is an essential belief—even if it is hard to wrap our analytical brains around. Paul was writing to this congregation only twenty or so years after the death and resurrection of Jesus; we're now over twenty centuries removed from the actual events, and we may not understand their importance much better. Death, in our human experience, is permanent. We sometimes talk of "cheating" it, but at the same time our mind tells us that death is the logical conclusion to what we know as life here on earth.

Rev. Lewis F. Galloway, senior pastor of Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis, writes in *Feasting on the Word* (© 2009 by Westminster John Knox Press):

"If there is no resurrection of the dead, and if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then the faith of the church is empty and without meaning. It is common in the church today for people to question, doubt, and even disbelieve the resurrection of the body... In this scientific age, people know all about the processes of nature... Modern medicine can resuscitate a body in certain circumstances, but no one has ever seen anyone raised from the dead who does not die again. People know the philosophical arguments against life after death; in this context, the testimony of the church can seem like a quaint myth leftover from a former age... There is every reason in the world to question, doubt, and disbelieve the resurrection, except one: 'But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died'" (1 Cor 15:20).

We may have read Paul's letters, attempted to explain life after death to our children, or learned to recite flowery statements about resurrection in our denominational creeds—all without fully understanding how central they are to the faith that binds us as Christian disciples. Belief in the resurrection of the body is an affirmation of how valuable human life really is. After all, believing that Jesus overcame the power of the grave and was resurrected after three days is an affirmation of his entire life. As Rev. Galloway asserts:

“Without the resurrection, the Christian faith can be reduced to little more than a moral code to guide well-meaning people about how to live their lives. How could anyone know that what Jesus said and what Jesus did are worth following? It is the resurrection that makes sense of the life and teachings of Jesus. Only in the light of the resurrection can believers understand the paradox of saving one’s life by losing one’s life... The doctrine of the resurrection invites people to join Christ in providing care and seeking justice for the most vulnerable people in our society and trusting that God will bless these efforts, even when the results cannot be seen. The resurrection gives the faithful the freedom to live their lives in the shadow of the cross, as Jesus did. The hope of the church [therefore] is not confined to this world.”

When we pause to consider the significance of Christ's resurrection—and in it, his promise of the forgiveness of sins and our own life after death—we are just beginning to scratch at the surface of what our faith life can and should do to guide the way we live our lives day in and day out.

May you come to know and live into the blessing of our Savior's resurrection this spring and throughout your days!

Yours in Christ's service,
Rev. Cory Germain