

St James United Church



Message for April 27, 2025

Second Sunday of Easter

“Shared Resurrection” - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

Revelation 1:48; Luke 24:13-35; Excerpt from Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy: A Vision for the Church*

“Christ is risen!” Three simple words but a profound statement of faith. We say them each Easter, and not just for one day but fifty, for the entire Easter season until we celebrate the gifting of the Spirit at Pentecost. But even that’s not enough. We should say “Christ is risen” each and every day, because the reality of Easter isn’t a seasonal or annual celebration but a declaration of faith that death had no power over Christ. He lives, and not just for a day or a season, but forever.

But as I shared last week, he lives not on his own, so that he died, he rose, he ascended and so lives in God, but we die in him, we rise in him, through him we ascend and so live in God. This is what Paul proclaims again and again in his letters, how he died to the flesh and Christ lives in him. This is possible through God’s free gift of life, of grace, affirmed in our baptism. And while we like to think this is only for those who believe in Jesus, that only the baptized can experience God’s renewing presence in their lives, baptism is a declaration we want to be open to God’s perennial action in our lives, Easter an assurance that God is always bringing healing from hurt, changing death into life, transmuting the pain of suffering into a source of renewal and growth.

I know that last one is tricky, and in no way am I saying suffering is a good in itself. That is not the case, pain and suffering not what God wants for us in this world. But neither are they absent from it. In each of our experiences, there is suffering, there is hurt, there is death. We may try to deny them, escape from them, but they will always be part of our reality. And so as we hear in the Book of Revelation, the people will look on the one they pierced. Christ may come on the clouds in glory but the scars of his torture will still be there, his body still broken. I find that to be a profound testimony of the value of all of our experiences, not just the good but the challenging.

And this is the heart of the gospel story we heard this morning as the Risen Christ comes alongside two disciples fleeing from Jerusalem. His identity is kept from them. We don’t know why but it could simply mean that they are so overwhelmed by their hurt and sorrow they can’t see the miracle in front of them. So what does Jesus do? He listens. He listens as they share their frustration and fear, and only as they share what’s on their hearts does he speak about the scriptures and where it offers wisdom for what happened to him. This speaks to the importance of empathy, of being present to people’s feelings, even that Jesus was present within them, not despite the hurt and sorrow but because of the hurt and sorrow. As they spoke through these feelings, they began experiencing hope, their despair shifted and they began to experience a personal resurrection, healing happening in the support and care that they received. But more than that they also felt renewed in their conviction for all Jesus had taught them and so came to a different understanding of what redemption might mean for them all and how Jesus was going to be a living and abiding presence with them to bring it about.

Until then they thought the culmination of Jesus' ministry would be freeing Israel from Rome's control, despite everything that he'd taught. That redemption was still rooted in a worldly view, just a reversal of who would demand supplication. But Jesus came to bring God's perspective into the world. Thus the redemption that he brought was the new life that we experience through solidarity, that comes as we choose empathy over ego, accept our shared vulnerability and come together in communities of love and support and care, where we recognize him as we break bread together. The meals that Jesus shared were not just with a few people but everyone, especially with those considered unwanted, unlovable. In these kinds of meals they experienced his continuing presence with them.

To use an image Pope Francis suggested, this is church as field hospital as we tend the needs of those who have been pierced by our world. This was modelled by the first Christians as the enslaved and impoverished were treated as equal to the rich and powerful, where those without a voice in the wider community could claim theirs, including women who were empowered to lead, where everyone was valued and so they spoke out against the practice of unwanted newborns being left to the elements, where caring for others was the highest good and so they looked after the sick during a plague at risk to their own health. They understood that they followed one pierced for loving those pierced before him, who suffered for standing with those who suffered, and were called to do the same.

And so are we. This is living the resurrection. In the Eastern church, resurrection is connected to theosis, the idea that in Christ we share in God's life, we express God's love, mercy, and justice, a process of divinization over a lifetime as we increasingly open ourselves to Christ's presence in us. Theosis is what John Wesley called sanctification, again as Paul writes, Christ is living in me. But it's more than a relationship I share with Jesus but must be lived outwardly as we model ourselves after him. Are we living in him if we are not living as he did, and so in these times not just caring for the sick or feeding the hungry, but perhaps operating a hotline for LGBTQ youth at risk, helping a migrant about to be deported, standing with neuro-diverse people, advocating for accessibility measures, offering support to Palestinians, calling out anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, sponsoring a refugee family, in other words reaching out to what Pope Francis called the outskirts. There we find Christ has gone ahead of us. He is there not just caring for individuals but lifting them up so they'll in turn lift up others and before we know it the whole world will rise up, animated in his love.

This is how we make our proclamation that "Christ is risen" come alive, as he not only brings new life to us as he comes alongside in our worry, grief and pain, but others too in our advocacy, compassion, and love. When Jesus' first disciples proclaimed the resurrection, they were told to be silent, were killed for their message. So what was so threatening? That heaven was now open? No. Many religions teach about an afterlife. They were a threat for the new life that the living Jesus in them made possible, nurtured in communities of empathy and concern, of solidarity and support, of love that advocates for justice, and of justice that leads to peace. That is still our call. As we do, "Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. Hallelujah." Amen.