

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Acts 4:32-35

Psalm 133

1 John 1:1-2:2

John 20:19-31

April 11, 2021

The Second Sunday of Easter

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Let me ask you a couple of questions this morning...Have you ever found yourself being silent when you saw someone hurting? Have you ever worried that you might get some strange glances if you had lunch with someone who was on the fringes of society? Have you ever been afraid you might be ridiculed for supporting a cause that wasn't popular with your friends?

In each of those cases (or in any number of other situations where your gut tells you one thing and society tells you another)...what did you do? Did you choose the faithful response? The one Jesus would have done? Or did you turn the other way and avoid controversy and judgment? Did you live out your faith or simply go with the popular or accepted action?

We face those kinds of situations all the time, especially when we find ourselves at the intersection of what we know we should do and what the world expects us to do. When the world's values make Christ's values unappealing and unpopular. When your personal security is threatened by the sacrifice required to do good.

So, now, this Sunday...the Sunday after Easter, we must reconcile within our hearts what it means to truly claim Jesus's resurrection and redemption. How does it change us? What is expected of us as Christians...especially when the world has entirely different expectations.

The simple answer is found in our collect for today which reminds us that Easter living is grounded in our commitment to "show in our lives what we profess by our faith." Maybe you are saying to yourself...well, of course, that's obvious, isn't it? Our Christian faith isn't just about a profession of faith, it's about a lived experience of faith even when it's hard or unpopular. It's doing what Jesus requires of us, following his example, being Christ-centered in our choices.

*But, is it really obvious?* Do we really understand and embody what life after Easter is all about? How do we show in our lives what we profess by our faith? We can't just celebrate the resurrection and then grab hold to our redemption and run. Easter living means that we must be willing and eager to be the kind of person Jesus taught us to be. We must strive to be different. We must want to change our lives to reflect the love of Christ in us.

However, this charge of living out our faith is a lot easier said than done. Because living after Easter means that we all must be ready to take risks and do the difficult work that Jesus began, to respond with our whole heart, to help the poor and the suffering, to stand up to injustice and speak up for the oppressed. It's taking unpopular stands and making choices that at times will come at some risk of personal security and will at times require sacrifice.

Here's what I mean by risk...Living faithfully means that we must put ourselves out there, even when our faithful actions are in opposition to the world around us. It means that we have to be willing to do the work of reconciliation even when it's unpopular. It means that we have to be willing to admit our mistakes and make peace with those whom we are in conflict. It means that we have to be humble and kind and loving even when we really don't want to be.

Unfortunately, we aren't always going to get it right, no matter how hard we try. So, we can take ourselves off of our moral pedestals right now. We will sin no matter how much we want to follow Christ. We will judge others. We will turn away from folks who need us. We will remain silent when our voice is critical. Our faith doesn't make us perfect. We are going to stumble, like it or not.

Our reading from 1 John outlines this exact kind of situation. The community of faith in 1 John is greatly divided over their beliefs and opinions, of who was more faithful, who was more enlightened. You might say it was easy within this community to point fingers at who was sinful and who wasn't.

The author of 1 John debunks their division and argues that Jesus didn't come to take sides or to celebrate those who claim to have no sin. Jesus came to be among us...each and every one of us...because we are all sinful. That's the power of Easter...God so loved humanity, even in the midst of our sin, that God sent Jesus to redeem us out of our darkness, knowing we would stumble, knowing that it would be hard to be faithful in an often faithless world.

I like to think that life after Easter Sunday gives us an incredible opportunity to ask ourselves the hard questions. To be honest with ourselves when we haven't lived what we profess. When we are tempted by money, greed, and power. When we are so preoccupied with being accepted that we forget to care for the loved ones right in our midst. When we so badly want the world's affirmation that we ignore Christ's calls of mercy, justice, and peace.

1 John makes it clear that sin will always pull us away from following Christ and living out our faith. But sin will never have the final answer. It's actually in claiming our sin, acknowledging where we have not lived as Christ desires, that brings us back to an active, powerful embodied profession of faith. In claiming where we have been and where we want to go as Christ's own is at the heart of 1 John's message.

*"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

That is the Good News of Easter Sunday for us today. Jesus continues to be our advocate so that our fellowship with God and with one another can grow stronger, that things like jealousy, envy, greed, hatred, and suspicion will cease. That judgement and ambivalence and self-centeredness will fade. That unity will abound and love will grow. But, it must start within each and every one of our hearts so that we show in our lives what we profess by our faith. Amen.