Four Resurrections + One

4 Easter

April 30, 2017

[Acts 2:14a,36-41](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Easter/AEaster3_RCL.html#ot1) [Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Easter/AEaster3_RCL.html#ps1)

[1 Peter 1:17-23](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Easter/AEaster3_RCL.html#nt1) [Luke 24:13-35](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Easter/AEaster3_RCL.html#gsp1)

(whisper) Today I’m going to talk about (pause) “the R-word.”

(Ask the congregation what “the R-word” is.)

Our Gospel reading for today is the famous encounter on the road to Emmaus: the resurrected Jesus joins up with two of his erstwhile disciples walking to Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem.

There’s a backstory here: when Jesus earlier got arrested, all the guys—all the men—took off. The one guy who stuck around, Peter, denied Jesus three times.

So these two on the seemingly innocent road to Emmaus have skedaddled out of town, apostolic tails between their legs.

These two have found yet another way to deny Jesus.

Let’s face it. This is all too often our own story: fear, cowardice, betrayal, and flight.

But . . . there *is* redemption here. There *is* resurrection here.

I think there are four signs of resurrection here; these signs still speak very much to us.

The first seems insignificant: As Luke tells it, “As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us; it’s almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So he went in to stay with them.”

What’s the message here about Jesus walking ahead “as if he were going on”?

There’s no “as if” about it. These two skeddadlers don’t recognize Jesus and they don’t get it when he tries to explain things to them.

So, he’s just going to move on.

But. . . there’s another “but” here: they *do* show hospitality and welcome a stranger, just as Torah tells them to do.

And that’s enough.

The message here is that Jesus isn’t going to force himself on us. It is *we* who have to invite him:

into our lives, into our homes, into our workplaces, into our churches, into our hearts.

The second point is this: once we have welcomed Jesus, *where* do we find him? This “where” is central to my own faith: “When [Jesus] was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.”

Luke tells us that it’s in *Communion*, it’s within *community*, that we recognize Jesus. Christianity is not a go-it-alone religion. (Actually, I don’t think any religion is.)

What I’m about to say may be heretical to many folks, but Christianity is not about being saved. It’s about being *in communion*, *in community*, with Jesus at the head of the table, breaking bread for us, breaking *himself* for us.

Following Jesus is about how we love one another.

Perhaps even more, Christianity is about how we love *the other*: the outsiders, the marginalized, the oppressed.

*That* is the community that Jesus models for us.

Once these two disciples are in communion with Jesus, once they have broken bread with him, they now have the courage to return to Jerusalem. As Luke emphasizes, “That very hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem.”

Why is the hour so important? Earlier they had asked Jesus to stay because, they said, “it’s almost evening and the day is now nearly over.”

In other words, they’re now going to head seven miles back to Jerusalem, when it’s dark, and on foot.

Probably not a very safe thing to do.

This is the third resurrection: they now have courage. They now have the risen Jesus.

The fourth resurrection for me is both serious and humorous. I think this is very important: we human beings can be very funny—just hang around Stef or Greg for five minutes.

But often times our funniness is *un*intentional. Right?

As I said, just hang around Greg or Stef for five minutes.

 Well, as these two disciples head back to Jerusalem, they suddenly feel very smart: Laurel says to Hardy, “Hey, Ollie, “Weren’t our hearts burning within us while Jesus was talking to us earlier on the road?”

Hardy in return puffs up his chest and says to Laurel, “You’re right, Stanley. Our hearts *were* burning while Jesus was opening the scriptures to us.”

Yeah, right.

These two have conveniently forgotten one thing: when they were on the road with Jesus—whom, by the way, they didn’t recognize—after they explained the recent events in Jerusalem, Jesus, in exasperation, says, “Give me a break! What dolts you two are! You’re too dim-witted to understand what the prophets have told you!”

This unintentional humor brings me back to my second point. Jesus, so to speak, tried beating them over the head with a Bible. But the two figured things out *only when* he broke bread with them, in community.

As Paul reminds us in First Corinthians, in Luke’s day eating Christ’s bread means sharing in his broken body, the one he sacrificed for all humankind: “This is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24).

So, we have four resurrections in today’s Gospel reading:

1. To *be* a resurrection people, we have to invite Jesus in.
2. We’re a resurrection people when we share Communion, when we’re a community.
3. Resurrection can give us the courage to persevere. Jesus was killed, murdered, by what Paul calls “the principalities and the powers” of his day. So, who are the murderous authorities of our day?

Resurrection can give us the courage to ask that question; resurrection can give us the courage to confront present-day principalities and powers; resurrection can give us the courage to return, so to speak, to Jerusalem.

1. The fourth resurrection is to realize how easily we, like the two disciples, fool ourselves. We think we’re smarter than we are. But, once again, we can do better if we trust our inflated egos to communion, and to community.

I want to close with a fifth resurrection. This one doesn’t come from the Bible; it comes from our Native American sisters and brothers.

This resurrection is called the Sun Dance.

The ceremony, the liturgy, the sacrament of the Sun Dance “is a grueling ordeal for the dancers, a physical and spiritual test that they offer in sacrifice for their people . . . . young men [and now women] dance around a pole to which they are fastened by rawhide thongs pegged through the skin of their chests.” They are then hoisted in the air where they sometimes hang for three to four days until the thongs break through the chest and they fall to the ground.

“While not all sun dance ceremonies include piercing, the object of the sun dance is to offer personal sacrifice for the benefit of one's family and community.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Personal sacrifice for one’s family and community.

We should all be Christian sun dancers.

When Christian missionaries encountered the Sun Dance, they said it was barbaric, and whites soon outlawed the Dance.

One Native said in response, “You let one guy do all the sacrificing for you 2,000 years ago. We *still* sacrifice ourselves for each other.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

So, to be a resurrection people, we, like Jesus, need to give of ourselves.

As we see with Jesus 2,000 years ago, self-sacrifice brings resurrection.

We have, then, not four or five but innumerable ways of practicing resurrection.

Amen.

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun_Dance>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I’m not sure of the source for this paraphrase; it was in a book I used a number of years ago in my Native American Religion class. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)