



Resurrection is Hard Work

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
August 9, 2015
Chris

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor

Resurrection is hard work. If it were easy, the world would be a very different place. Resurrection means that we have to leave behind who we have been. Resurrection means that we have to let go of who we are - to be who God has called us to be. It is hard work - and yet as people of faith we are not afraid of hard work. Or at the very least - we did not used to be afraid of hard work when our faith in Jesus and our relationship with God was more central to who we were as a people. When our community of faith was more easily defined as the center point of our social standing or at least just left of center. However, the world has changed - and the church, our church, every church has had a difficult time understanding the change let alone rising to the challenge of living with the change. For some it has been easier to build up the walls - for others - they have circled the wagons - and for a brave and might few - we have looked outside the walls at the world that does not look much like us anymore and decided to follow Jesus. So my friends, welcome to the brave new world, now what do we do!?

Well I have a few suggestions.

First, we listen to Jesus. And today Jesus speaks to us, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. 41 Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven?" Jesus comes to the world first as an infant— finally as a Savior. You can almost imagine the grumblings of those who have gathered to hear him. "Bread of what?" This is Joseph's boy—come down from heaven?" Is he kidding? And Jesus is quick to respond... "Do not complain among yourselves. 44 No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

Good words full of promise - if one among us has any clue what the phrase "bread of life" means for us and for the world today. This "bread of life" come down from heaven—this Jesus—the one who calls us each by name and shares with us the joy of the kingdom—eternally and in the here and now. We tend to live in the world as if this world is here to teach us pain, grief, suffering—we can, each of us, share those experiences. And yet God calls us to hear the words of Jesus—the bread of life—the Kingdom of God has come near. The Kingdom of God is at hand. These are not future promises of Jesus—they are statements of truth in this present time. We may not always be able to see the light of the kingdom for the shadows of this world—and yet the light shines in the darkness, the Bible tells us, and the darkness cannot overcome it. Even when the shadows blind our eyes. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." I am the living bread—the common made holy. Now maybe we are getting somewhere. So what's next.

After we listen to Jesus - the second most important thing we can do is remember who we are - where we have come from. Anyone remember the name Elijah? He's the main guy in the snippet of the story we hear in 1st Kings out of the Old Testament today. It is one of my favorites because Elijah is a prophet like no other. In Elijah's day, King Ahab



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marries a Phoenician princess named Jezebel who turns the people of God away from Yahweh so that they begin to worship Baal and in the process has Yahweh's prophets slaughtered. So Elijah calls on King Ahab to bring the 450 priests of Baal to Mt. Carmel to call down fire on an altar and bull sacrifice - they offered to Baal. The people of Israel come as well. The priests of Baal call on their god from morning to afternoon and still there is no response – no fire. Elijah decides to taunt the poor prophets of Baal - "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." ²⁸ So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. ²⁹ Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

³⁰ Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord, which had been torn down. ³¹ Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, "Your name shall be Israel." ³² With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he dug a trench around it. ³³ He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood." ³⁴ "Do it again," he said, and they did it again. "Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time. ³⁵ The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench. ³⁶ At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. ³⁷ Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." ³⁸ Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. ³⁹ When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!" ⁴⁰ Then Elijah commanded them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!" They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there. And we pick up the story today in verse 4...

³ Elijah was afraid^a and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." ⁵ Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." ⁶ He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. ⁷ The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." ⁸ So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. ⁹ And from there we find Elijah visited by the Lord in a cave and the arrival of Elisha who will take Elijah's place when God calls Elijah home. Remember how Elijah's story ends – a chariot of fire carries Elijah into the presence of God. God's promise through all of the valleys and mountains of this life never ends.



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When we remember who we are – where we have come from – we are ready for the life, Jesus has called us to live. And this life, Jesus calls us to live, is grounded in one word of hope – one word of joy – one word of promise – and that word is resurrection.

- When some are ready to welcome all to the table and others want to keep “those people” out. The word is resurrection.
- When some are ready to step out in faith with a boldness that surprises the most faithful among us and others want to keep things exactly the way they are. The word is resurrection.
- When a church decides to shift its Sunday morning worship schedule knowing some will leave and others will come. The word is resurrection.
- When the diagnosis means that one day they will no longer recognize you. The word is resurrection.
- When we trust our God enough to let go of what has been for what will be. The word is resurrection.
- When we let go of our fear to follow where Jesus will lead us. The word is resurrection.
- When we believe that we are not enough and God tells us that we are. The word is resurrection.
- When we stand at the edge of the grave of a love one praying/begging/wishing for one more day. The word is resurrection.
- When what God wants finally becomes more important than what we want. The word is resurrection.
- When our Savior hangs on a cross for our sins. The word is resurrection.

Resurrection *is* hard work. Resurrection means that we have to leave behind who we have been; that we have to let go of who we are - to be who God has called us to be. It is hard work. It is the reason God invites us into a life of discipleship as we follow Jesus. We are in this moment witnesses to the resurrection moments happening all around us. And by God's grace and strength they are too numerous to count. Resurrection is hard word. It is hard for all of us. But not for God. But not for God. Amen.