

How Do You Experience Resurrection
John 20
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Dr. Don Flowers, Jr.
Port Williams United Baptist Church

Tom Long, professor of preaching at Emory, tells of driving one day, hitting the scan button on his radio, and stumbling on to a Christian radio talk show. About the time he tuned in, Barbara was describing the trouble she was having with life—she was separated from her husband, had lost her job, had conflict with her teenage children—all the makings of a great Country song. Suddenly the host interrupted and asked rather pointedly, “Barbara, are you a believer? Now Barbara, if you’re not a believer you’ll never solve any of these problems. So Barbara, are you a believer?”

She was taken aback, stumbled with her answer, “Well, I don’t know.”

“Well, if you were a believer you would know!” he declared. “Now Barbara, are you a believer?”

Again she paused, “Well, I just don’t know. I think I would like to be. I guess I’m just more of an agnostic now.”

The host rose to that bait and said, “Well Barbara, I’ve written a book with irrefutable proof that Jesus rose from the dead and is who he said he is. If I were to send you this book, would you be a believer?”

“Well, I don’t know. I’ve had a lot of problems with preachers...”

“Barbara, I’m not talking about preachers! I’m talking about proof! Now if I send you this book, will you become a believer?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “I am having a lot of trouble right now just trusting people.”

“Barbara, I’m not talking about trust. I’m talking about truth. This book has proof! Now if I send you this book, will you be a believer?”

This back and forth continued for a few more minutes until Barbara reluctantly said, “Well, I guess so.”

Long says he wishes she had stuck to her guns a bit more! I know that sounds strange coming from a preacher—especially on Easter. But the fact is that we don’t have proof of the resurrection. There isn’t a video tape of the empty tomb, a seismograph of the Easter earthquake. In fact, not one of the gospel writers describes the resurrection as it occurred. It is as if it happens outside our experience, only in the mystery of God.

All we have are these stories, told and believed, told again and believed, told again until the story falls upon our ears, until something within us resonates with the truth. Until something deep within us says, “Yes! That is my experience of the Living Jesus!” We come today to remember, to celebrate the presence of the Living Christ in our lives! That is why we are here!

But we didn't get here the same way. My guess is that some of you drove in today by different ways. Some of you drove down 358. Others came via High Street. Some of us came from Kentville, down Belcher Street; others from New Minas or Wolfville—each, unless you came together, using a different route. Some haven't come at all! You are watching from home via the internet.

There are a multitude of ways that we have come to this commemoration of the resurrection of Christ.

And contrary to this radio preacher, there are many ways that we come to experience the resurrection of Christ. Not all are the same.

John seems to understand that. In the 20th chapter, which congregations across the world will be reading today, we have 4 different stories, 4 different ways that people came to experience the resurrection, different ways that they came to believe.

The first is the one we just heard. John tells us that Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and discovered that it was open. Thinking someone had robbed the grave she ran back to get Peter and the beloved disciple, most think John. They raced back to the tomb, and rushed in, and saw.....nothing!

And believed everything!

There are people who are like that. There has never been a time in their life that they haven't believed. From before the Cradle Roll to the moment they breathe their last breath, they are believers. They just know that Jesus is alive! They seem oblivious to questions, to doubt. The struggles that come with life just don't bother them, they don't shake their faith.

Their faith is intuitive. They just know. Something deep inside them just knows the resurrection to be true. They don't need proof, and even if it were there they know that their faith can't be explained, and it doesn't have to. It is real!

Those people come here this morning, as they have every Easter of their life, celebrating!

Is that your experience?

Special Music

Morning Has Broken

Some people experience the resurrection almost by intuition..

But not everybody.

The second story John gives is that of Mary. After Peter and John have gone away, she is left alone in the garden with her grief, her bewilderment, the shambles of her life. This one in whom she had place so much hope, this one who had loved her, who had opened her eyes to the possibilities of life—this Jesus was gone! And now, now even his body had been taken away. She was left with nothing—not only nothing physically, but a void in her soul.

And it was there, as she was weeping, she heard it. "Mary." It was the sound of her name. "Mary." It was the sound of Jesus voice, calling her name! And everything changed!

Her grief turned to joy; her bewilderment was transformed to faith. All because she heard the risen Lord call her name!

There are some who have experienced the resurrection in just that way. They have had a personal experience with the risen Lord. They can't explain it, but somehow they heard it.

Frederich Buechner, the wonderful minister-writer-theologian recounts the time that he was taking communion. It was something he had done countless times before. But that day, as his friend was handing him the chalice, said to him, "*The blood of Christ, Freddy, the cup of salvation.*"

*"Nearly no one calls me Freddy," Buechner said! "But that day, that day I heard Jesus call me! I knew that he knew my name. Jesus knew me, not in some social churchy way that we call the name of the person we see every week, but in the way that the father threw his arms around that prodigal child."*¹

Jesus knows our name and invites us to his party in a way that we know that the party won't be complete unless we are there!"

There are times, in the midst of our lives—perhaps a time of great turmoil, a time you are struggling, a time when it seems that everything has come apart—you hear your name. Your name! You have a personal experience of the resurrection.

Is that your experience?

Special Music

In The Garden

Some people experience the resurrection by intuition. They just know. Some have a personal experience with the risen Lord.

But not all.

The third story John tells is of the disciples huddled in a locked room, terrified that they might be the next ones led away to be crucified. In the midst of their terror, Jesus appears to them. He just shows up and says, "Peace be with you," "As the Father has sent me, so send I you," he Breathed on them and they received the Holy Spirit. "If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven."

These sound like random phrases to us, but for John's readers they would have recognized them immediately! They were part of the liturgy of the early church. They knew the words, they could respond appropriately.

We have those. If the leader says, "The Lord be with you," we know to respond, "And also with you." "This is the word of the Lord...Thanks be to God." That is what this story is about!

And as strange as it may seem, there are those who have experienced the resurrection through the life and ministry of the church! In my former life I was the Minister of Youth and Activities at another church in SC. There were several members of our youth group who first showed up to play basketball. They played on one of our youth

¹ https://day1.org/articles/5d9b820ef71918cdf2003a1e/the_seeing_heart

teams, found friends, kept coming, and before you knew it were on Mission Trips teaching children Bible Stories!

I know people who, when asked say, "I came to play on the softball team." Granted, it was one of the worst softball teams in the history of the sport, but that person is still there!

There are individuals who have come to our youth group, to play with the chimes, to sing in the choir. They came as a part of our Play Group, a Soup and Chowder lunch. They were just here, a part of the normal everyday stuff that happens in church, and they had a sense of Jesus being with them!

It may not have happened all at once, but it happened! You may not even be able to pinpoint the day, the moment, but there was a time when you were sitting in worship and suddenly the words of a hymn, of a litany, tasting the communion bread...and you felt overwhelmed by that amazing grace of God.

Is that your experience?

Special Music Let All the World

Celebration of Communion

Some people experience the resurrection through the life and ministry of the church. Through the stuff that we do here all the time. In the words, "The Lord be with you...". "You are the people of God....,"

Communion is something we do all the time, on the first Sunday of each month. It seems strange doing it on Easter, it is usually a Maundy Thursday thing. But on that first Easter Jesus visited the disciples and spoke words that have become a part of the ritual of the church. Just like this meal

So this morning, we share this meal. Not as a memorial to Christ's death, but to his life, and the life he gives us.

Some people experience resurrection almost through intuition, others through an experience where they heard Jesus call their name. Some come to experience resurrection through the life and ministry of the church.

But not all!

There are others, who....well.

That is the story of Thomas! Old Thomas! We know him well don't we? "The rest of you may believe all this women talk about people coming back from the dead! You may be awash in your sentimentality, in your grief! But not me! Not me! Unless I see something tangible, stick my fingers in the holes of his hands, I am not going to believe!"

It was a week later when Jesus showed up again to the disciples. This time Thomas was with them, and Jesus called him out! "Thomas, you said you needed something more. Well here! Touch my hands! Touch my side!"

The scripture never says that Thomas actually touched Jesus! He really didn't need to. All he needed was Jesus coming to him in a way he could understand!

Most people know CS Lewis as the author of such wonderful Christian writings such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *Mere Christianity*. What you may not know is that Lewis came to faith late in life—after graduating from Oxford. He tells the story in his wonderful autobiography *Surprised by Joy*. He just couldn't get his mind around this whole God thing! It just wouldn't make sense to him! But his mind would not allow him to just walk away. Neither would his friends who kept pushing deep and probing writers his way.

In a particularly telling chapter, Lewis writes how he at last came to faith. He writes:

You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.

I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the Divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms. The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that Love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape? The words compelle intrare, compel them to come in, have been so abused by wicked men that we shudder at them; but, properly understood, they plumb the depth of the Divine mercy. The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation.²

CS Lewis had heard the stories, had known friends—but it wasn't till Christ came to him in a rather unorthodox way, in a way he could understand that he could experience the resurrection!

John says there are so many more stories, so many other experiences of the risen Lord that all the books in the world couldn't contain them. And today all across the world, the confession is being declared! Christ is risen!

But has he risen for you? How have you experienced the resurrection in your life?

By intuition—there has never been a time when you haven't known!

By hearing Jesus call your name?

Through the life and ministry of the church?

In a way, perhaps the only way that Jesus could get your attention?

Know that your experience is valid! Don't ever let anyone try to tell you differently! We come to Easter faith by different routes, through different doors, through different experiences. But our confession is the same!

² <http://www.epubbud.com/read.php?g=9RTP6VKJ&to cp=16#chapter16>

Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen indeed! I pray that might be your experience—even this day!