



Friendship with God

Psalm 133 & John 20:19-31

Easter 2 - April 7, 2024

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At the end of a particularly well-written short story, John Cheever provides this remarkable thought:

It is not, as somebody once wrote, the smell of corn bread that calls us back from death; it is the light and signs of love and friendship.

What we receive in the post-resurrection vignette from the Gospel of John is a story of love and friendship; the love of Jesus Christ for that band of friends that we call disciples, but he called friends.

The pericope is filled with a deep and profound undergirding profession of Christ's love for the folks who had been so very close to him during the last three years of his earthly life. He comes to them; seeks them out and even patiently endures the questions and challenges that they place before him. The important thing to remember from this passage of scripture is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is done from a place of love; the love of God for humankind and the faith and trust in God that can be our response to that love.

William Willimon, a favorite of mine, once wrote:

The Christian Church needs to remind itself, on this Sunday after Easter, that we have hope, not because of something that we have decided, or found, or created, but rather based upon the stunning act of a God who hears, who cares, who moves in among us. If there is to be a hope for us as humanity, it must come from some power, some force that manages to be both with us and yet beyond us, for us yet not arising out of us. We believe that hope is in the resurrection of Jesus. ... We believe, not on the basis of our wishes, our emotions, our insight, but on the basis of the act of God in resurrection of Jesus.

This hope that we hold in our hearts, this trust that we have in the great love and mercy of God demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, does not come from within us. It is not some kind of divine spark that we are called to nurture and use in order to somehow better ourselves or better our chances for a soft-landing in eternity. We have this faith, this trust, this hope because something has happened outside of us and not by our doing; we have this hope solely and completely because of God. Because God has acted and has confronted us, we have encountered God in the risen Christ. This is the basis of our hope: God's action and not our own. Remember those words that Jesus delivered to Thomas, that we heard this morning already:

**Have you believed because you have seen me?
Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.**

The story that the writer of the Gospel of John delivers to us should be a sure and certain reminder to the church that faith is not something of our manufacture; we don't 'gin' up our faith as it were in order to believe, we believe because God has given us faith and it makes all the difference in our lives.

John Webster, a British theologian puts it this way:

Faith defines my being; it does not modulate a being which I already have or am. In faith, I am not my own.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to live by the light of God and not our own lights as appealing as that may seem to us. We are called to look toward the goodness of God as our key for living life and not just seek our own sense of good or right for us. We are called to live in the light and love of God that has encountered us in Jesus Christ.

Elsewhere, John Webster adds this:

In this, God is our unconditional accusation and our unconditional acquittal. On the one hand, this spells the end of the fantasy of being our own judge, finding a source of moral truth in ourselves independent of any reference to the presence and action of God. On the other hand, this liberates by setting us in the light of the one true judgment.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ proclaims the ultimate goodness and light of God. There is no darkness behind God; God is light and it is by this light that we are called to live.

So, children of God, live your life in the light of God. Be towards others the love and graciousness that you have witnessed in Jesus Christ. Live in the light of God's love. This is the light that calls us back from death, the death of our own way of doing things and being our own Lord and master. It is not the smell of cornbread or even the light and love of friendship that calls us back, but rather the very light and love of God. Easter proclaims this to us and to the world rather loudly – are we not able to hear it?