**The Resurrection: Enfleshed in Us**

**Text: Luke 24:36-48**

**Preached by Bruce D. Ervin**

**April 8, 2018**

It was a broken down building, in a broken down neighborhood. The families who could afford to live elsewhere had long since left the area. Unemployment was high, crime was high, street gang activity was high, and a lot of the people were getting high. About the only thing that wasn’t high was hope.

One day a stranger arrived in the neighborhood. He was a minister, fresh out of seminary, and he had a vision for urban ministry. He started talking to the young men hanging out on the street corner, made himself known to the principal of the local school, got to know some of the parents. I’ve long since forgotten his name, but the folks started calling him “Rev.”

I’m sure they thought he was crazy. Why would anyone come to this neighborhood and start a new church? But slowly he started to gain the trust of the parents and the young teens and the gang members. At first they were worshipping in a rented storefront, but they soon outgrew that space. That’s when they looked at this broken down building. It was an old bus garage. Hadn’t been used for years. And it was for sale. The young minister took a few of his youth leaders to look at the building. He asked one of them how much they should pay for the garage and the young man said, “Rev, I wouldn’t give five cents for this place!”

Well, they agreed upon a price. Somehow they found the money for a down payment. I believe it was our own Disciples Board of Church Extension that gave them the mortgage and the funds to rehab the place, and they turned that old garage into a church and a youth center, with a first-rate skating rink and an industrial grade kitchen. The moms cooked chicken dinners to raise funds for the ministry, the youth held skating parties as an alternative to gang activities, and everybody got together for a rousing worship service on Sundays.

It was a case of resurrection. God took a broken-down building in a broken-down neighborhood filled with broken families and broken lives, and God created new life!

It wasn’t the first time that God brought new life to broken-down community. That community of disciples was mighty broken on a Sunday night nearly 2,000 years ago. Their leader was dead. Crucified by the Romans 3 days before. Rumors had been swirling around all day that somehow he was alive again, but clearly they didn’t believe it. Like that crime-ridden, dispirited community in Chicago, they were terrified, and their hope was gone.

This was the context in which they saw Jesus. And at first it did nothing to lift their spirits. The scripture says, “They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost” (Lk. 24:37). And Jesus said, “Why are you frightened?” Which is, of course, similar to “Be not afraid,” which is the kind of thing that angels and God and Jesus himself frequently say to would-be believers who are scared out of their wits. He shows them his wounded hands and feet. He invites them to touch him. And now they’re starting to think that maybe this really *is* Jesus; not some ghost, not some figment of their imaginations, not some cruel joke that someone is trying to play on them. They’re starting to get happy, but at the same time, on some level, they still don’t believe. So he says, “You know what? This resurrection stuff takes a lot of energy, and I’m hungry. You got anything to eat?”

Maybe that did the trick, or maybe not. The text doesn’t really say. The disciples might’ve still been unbelieving, even as they watched him eat the fish. People do have a tendency to stick with their preconceived notions, no matter how much evidence you present. Maybe it took a few more encounters with the Risen Lord before their lives were transformed from fear to faith.

Regardless of what it took to make believers out of the disciples, the story is designed to make believers of *us*, the Church. *We* are the ones who have witnessed the Resurrection through the power of story, and we are the ones who are now to go and proclaim repentance and forgiveness to all nations. As we said last week, we are to be the hands and feet of Jesus. We are to be the Body of the Risen Christ in the world.

Luke’s story makes clear in a very graphic way that Resurrection is *corporal*. That is to say, it is *embodied*. Disembodied spirits – be they ghosts or visions or bad dreams or whatever – disembodied spirits don’t eat broiled fish. And whatever the historical reality is behind these closing chapters of Luke’s gospel, or whatever theory you have about what really happened on Easter morning and during the following 40 days, surely the point of the story here is that we are to take seriously the corporal, embodied nature of resurrection life today. The new life that God brings into the world takes on an *embodied* existence. The Resurrection isn’t just about nice ideas or warm feelings. Nice ideas and warm feelings don’t eat fish! It’s real people, organized into caring communities, what eat fish and cook fish and serve fish to hungry souls. Resurrection life is embodied life.

Good ideas, by themselves, are not good enough. I don’t know how many planning processes I’ve seen that produce a new and wonderful vision for an organization on *paper*, but no one ever gets around to *implementing* it. By the way, do you know how many Christians it takes to change a light bulb? It takes 5 people to form the committee, but no one ever gets around to changing the light bulb. Good ideas are not good enough. I mean, planning is good and visions are great but they have to take on flesh. They have to become embodied. Resurrection life is embodied life. Even if it’s embodied at first in nothing more than a broken-down, old garage. Rev’s great ideas wouldn’t have gone anywhere without a building in which to implement them. A vision must be embodied in order to make a difference in the real world. You need people and processes and land and buildings and budgets and money. It starts with a vision, but it becomes enfleshed. Thus the Risen Christ takes on flesh today in the people and processes and buildings and budgets and money and ministries that bring good news to the neighborhoods and nations of the world.

The Resurrection is corporal, and it is *communal*. The new life that the New Testament is all about becomes enfleshed in *community*. That is to say, the Risen Christ takes on flesh in communities of faiths like ours, where people love each other and work together and fight with each other and pool their varied gifts and pray together and do ministry. Of the 10 encounters with the Risen Christ in Matthew, Luke and John (as we learned last week, the Risen Christ doesn’t actually appear in Mark’s gospel); of these 10 encounters, 3 are individual and 7 are communal. In other words, 3 of them involve a one-on-one conversation between the Risen Lord and an individual, while in the other 7 there is a *group* of people who experience the presence of the Risen Christ *together*. And in the oldest accounts of the Resurrection that we have – in the 15th chapter of Paul’s 1st Letter to the Corinthians – Paul talks about how the Risen Lord appeared – yes – first to an individual, Simon Peter, but then to “the twelve,” later to “all the apostles,” and at one point to a gathering of 500 people! Of course, there’s something compelling about those individual, one-on-one encounters (especially Jesus’ conversation with Mary in the garden in John’s gospel, where Jesus calls Mary by name), and they bring to mind beloved hymns with an individualistic bent such as *In the Garden* (“*I* come to the garden *alone*…and he walks with *me* and he talks with *me*”), and I’m always moved when someone talks about an encounter with the Risen Christ while he or she was alone in prayer or walking alone at Camp. Those individual encounters with the Risen Lord are powerful and they’re real. But the fact of the matter is that the *primary* thrust of the New Testament and its witness to the Resurrection is *communal*. The Risen Lord tends to appear to small groups and communities of people, and the Spirit of the Risen Christ soon becomes embodied in the *Church*, and it is the Church that carries forth the good news; the Church – the *community* of faith – where (yes) people love each other and work together and fight with each other and pool their varied gifts and pray together and do ministry. When Paul says to the Church “You are the Body of Christ,” he’s not just using flowery language. He really means it! The Church is the Body of the Risen Christ. The Church is the corporal reality in which the Spirit of the Risen Christ is alive and well and engaged in mission. *We* are the Body of Christ! *We* are the resurrection community. We witness the Resurrection in our midst, and we are to be witnesses to the Resurrection. The word for witness in Greek is *martus* and it has to do not so much with actually seeing something but with bearing testimony to what we know to be true; telling others about what we know to be true; telling others about the good news of God’s love and the good news of Christ’s victory over death that we have experienced in this community of faith.

It’s the food that does it. The Resurrection is corporal, and the Resurrection is communal, and the key is when the community of disciples give the Risen Lord something to eat. Now if it was me I might be more interested in some barbequed chicken than in some broiled fish, but the point is that the embodied presence of the Risen Lord is revealed when food is shared in community.

We do that real good around here!

The only reason why we’re not having a meal today in Fellowship Hall is because we’re having several meals next week at Camp as part of our All-Church Retreat.

There’s nothing like food to bring people together in community. It took me some years to recognize this. You see, when I was growing-up, food was rationed in our home. My mother never quite accepted the fact that the Depression was over. We never went hungry, and in fact with both of my parents working there was plenty of money, but Mom made small meals because – you know – you want to make sure that they’ll be enough for tomorrow. If she cooked a steak, she cooked 1 steak for all 5 of us. And, did you know that you can divided a chicken heart 3 ways? So, when I was growing-up, food brought with it a hint of fear and scarcity; not the kind of faith and abundance that was preached by Jesus and practiced by the early Church.

Fast forward to my teenage years. Now I’m running track and growing fast and my capacity for food has increased exponentially! And friends are inviting me to their homes for dinner. Well, I don’t know, maybe their moms didn’t live through the same Depression that my mom lived through but anyway, they’re encouraging me to eat as much as I want. It was like I’d won the lottery or something! You give me good food, and I’m going to love you forever. And I suspect that I’m not alone in that regard. You welcome me into your home and give me good food and I’m going to feel like part of the family! Which is why, when someone comes to the Church – especially for the first time – it’s so important to offer them a snack or a meal or at least a cup of coffee. Food brings people together in community. It’s all part of the embodied life, and the communal life, of the Risen Christ. Jesus said, “Where 2 or 3 are gathered, there I am in the midst of them…especially if you’ve got a casserole and some cherry pie on the table!” There must be some ancient Greek texts that read that way; somehow that verse didn’t make it into our English translations.

“Now you are the Body of Christ,” Paul tells the congregation in Corinth. He means, “You are the embodied presence of the Risen Christ, gathered together in a community of faith.” And *we* are the Body of Christ. Right here, on the corner of 15th and K in downtown Bedford; we are the embodied presence of the Risen Christ. We worship and share food and give away warm coats and sing and welcome strangers in his Name. We celebrate new life in his Name. We *embody* new life in his Name. Last week one of our members said, “We’re not dying anymore.” That’s the most profound expression of Resurrection that I’ve heard in some time. Usually, you know, when you say that someone is dying you mean, “The end is near. There’s no hope.” And maybe, several years ago, it would’ve been an accurate statement to say, “First Christian Church is dying.” But we’re not dying anymore. The Spirit of the Risen Christ is alive in this place. The Spirit of the Risen Christ is moving in this place. The Spirit of the Risen Christ is embodied in this place! The Resurrection is enfleshed in us and in the Church everywhere. Repentance and forgiveness and the good news of his unconditional love are to be proclaimed to all the nations, beginning from the corner of 15th and K in Bedford. Let’s do it!