

## **Sermons at St. Luke's**

*A sermon preached by the Rev. Joseph H. Hensley, Jr. on Sunday, April 26, 2009.*

You may remember this song we often sing on Easter Sunday: “Now the green blade riseth, from the buried grain. Wheat that in dark earth many days has lain. Love lives again, that with the dead has been. Love is come again like wheat that springeth green.”

The lush spring rising green after a long winter reminds us of Christ's resurrection. The love of Christ comes again and again like wheat that springeth green, but in light of Earth Day this past week, we might wonder about that wheat. Is it genetically modified? Has it been sprayed with harmful pesticides? In this morning's Gospel from Luke, Jesus demonstrates his bodily resurrection by eating a piece of cooked fish. Again, in light of Earth Day, we might wonder about that fish. Is it wild or farm raised? Does it contain dangerous levels of mercury? Would it be safe for a pregnant woman to eat? Whether it's Earth Day or not, it's nearly impossible to avoid the warnings about the environment: pollution, global warming, and so on. We believe in the resurrection of Christ. How does the resurrection of our Savior connect with the resurrection of a world that is struggling under the weight of human activity?

Do you feel like sighing? Some of us are sighing because we're tired of hearing about the “environmental crisis.” Some of us are sighing because we see the signs, we believe the warnings, and we just feel overwhelmed. Some of us are sighing because we do not know what to think or believe. There's so much to be done, 1001 ways to save the planet, 1001 experts telling us what is wrong and what catastrophes we can expect if we don't act in time. It is enough to make us want to sigh.

Psalm 4, which we read this morning, includes this verse: “Many are saying, 'Oh that we might see better times!' Lift up the light of your countenance on us, O Lord.” We might feel like sighing in our confusion, but we can also call to God for enlightenment. The letter of 1 John says that “Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed.” The disciples who witness Jesus in the flesh are simultaneously joyous and disbelieving. The theme here is a mixture of uncertainty and hope. We are trying to find our way, but we know that God is on our side. We may have trouble seeing better times for the environment, and yet we also believe that God's light shines on us. We wonder if we have the will to change our destructive behaviors, and at the same time we believe in resurrection. The question is how we put our belief into practice.

There is a phrase, “practice resurrection,” which is the final verse of one of my favorite poems by author Wendell Berry. Practice resurrection. Berry's poem, which has the curious title, “Manifesto, the Mad Farmer Liberation Front,” reflects Berry's deep concern for the earth (Berry is also a farmer who still uses horse teams to plow his fields in Kentucky). That line, “practice resurrection” has always grabbed my attention. It reminds me that resurrection is not merely something that we declare in a creed or read about in a book. Jesus intentionally shows his disciples that his rising is not just a matter of spirit, but of flesh and blood. His rising is not just something to be imagined. It is about the body coming to life again, a body that bears wounds, a body that eats and drinks, a body that walks on the earth. Resurrection is indeed reflected in the green blade of wheat rising from the buried grain. Resurrection is about real life coming up out of the dust, something to be experienced, lived, practiced.

How do we practice resurrection? We are not talking about literally raising people from the dead. It is more like expecting new life and new possibilities even in the face of death. A few lines of Berry's poem put it this way:

Listen to carrion - put your ear  
close, and hear the faint chattering  
of the songs that are to come.  
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.

Practicing resurrection is about listening to death, listening to carrion, the dead things, with the expectation of something new, the faint chattering of the songs that are to come. We respect death. Indeed, things have to die in order for new life to emerge. Practicing resurrection means expecting the end of one world so that a new one might come into being. We can even laugh in the face of death, not because death is funny, but because we know we are God's children. Like children who laugh with wonder and delight, we can laugh, not to mock death but in expectation of a new world. We laugh, expecting things to change, expecting God's light to shine in our darkness. Practicing resurrection means laughing in the face of death, acknowledging its power to transform but denying it the final word.

What does this have to do with our care for the earth? We do not know how things are going to turn out. We do not know if we will be able to do what needs to be done to avoid the environmental catastrophes that have been predicted. Practicing resurrection should mean that we are not afraid. We do not fear death, but we also try not to cause needless suffering and death. If Jesus was raised in body, mind, and spirit, then practicing resurrection involves our whole selves too: body, mind, and spirit. It involves being careful about how our bodies walk upon the body of our mother earth, from which we draw our life. It means that we, like the wheat seed, come from the earth. We are connected to the soil. Practicing resurrection means doing what we can to see that whatever new world is coming into being is one in which life can flourish. We do not act out of fear but out of hope and thanksgiving for all we have been given.

Instead of sighing over 1001 ways to save mother earth, practice resurrection by doing one thing at a time with laughter and joy and thanksgiving. Practice resurrection by believing that God loved us children enough to entrust us with the care of God's creation, and God loves us enough to show us how to be better caretakers. As Psalm 4 says, "God does wonders for the faithful, when I call upon the Lord, he will hear me." Hear us, O God. We are your children. Help us to believe in the miracle of resurrection. Help us to make it real in our lives through our care for each other and for the earth which you have made. And help us to laugh with joy and wonder and thanksgiving in all your works. [Singing] "When our hearts are wintry, grieving or in pain, thy touch can call us back to life again. Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been, Love is come again like wheat that springeth green."