

Easter Sunday

April 8, 2012

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Acts 10:1-48; John 20:1-18

Christ is Risen! (He is Risen Indeed!)

The fact is – we live after the Resurrection of Jesus!

Yet, in a world full of “posts”

– post-modern, post-industrial, post-colonial, post-Christendom, post-Christian, post-evangelical; **we are not post-Resurrection**

**Resurrection is the Ultimate Act or Event of Reorientation. Why?**

– For us – resurrection is not a past event.

**we live in the midst of Resurrection** – we are the people of resurrection

– the community of Resurrection

– Resurrection defines who we are as the people of God

– it is Resurrection life that flows through each of us who participate in the resurrection of Jesus (what we declare through our baptisms)

But before Resurrection, what Jesus said had little meaning . . .

– **no one had any idea that this was to be a new creation.**

Yet this is what Resurrection is!

*Resurrection is the in-breaking of a new story;*

*Resurrection is the in-breaking of a new community, of a new humanity into the history of the world!*

*Resurrection is “defibrillator paddles jump starting our hearts and lives” to live in a radically new way!*

So then, it seems really strange that Acts 10 is the text for Resurrection Sunday

It is a story of brokenness, a story of healing!

**Acts 10 could not be more relevant in light of Easter**

**Acts 10 is a story that only can happen because of Resurrection;**

**Because it is a story of the Spirit – Resurrection and Spirit are utterly connected!**

The **main character** in this story is NOT Cornelius, not Peter, not Cornelius’ household, nor those who accompanied Peter to Cornelius – **the main character is the Holy Spirit.**

Acts 10 is an Easter Story because wherever the Spirit is active we live in the reality of Easter!

**The moving of the Spirit begins with Cornelius** – a Roman centurion, a person comfortable with violent ways to bring about Pax Romana.

He is identified as a God-fearer, who gave to the poor, yet, he represents Roman occupation. Yet, he is one who took on the faith of those he occupied – he prayed to God regularly.

And now this centurion, this Cornelius is encountered, after the Resurrection of Jesus, after Pentecost, by a messenger of God  
– and he received a vision  
– a vision which called for him to summon Peter.

**The moving of the Spirit continues with Peter.** The following day, as Cornelius’ servants are on their way to Peter, Peter falls into a trance while he was praying on a rooftop, and has a vision of every kind of unclean animal and is given the command to “get up Peter, kill and eat.” Peter protests eating any of these unclean and impure animals and is addressed by God – “do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

**The moving of the Spirit brings the servants of Cornelius together with Peter.** While Peter was still reflecting on the meaning of the vision he received, Cornelius’ servants are downstairs looking for him – and the Spirit relates to him, “Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”

**The moving of the Spirit brings Peter together with Cornelius.** More than awkward – Jewish law prohibits Jews and Gentiles from meeting – An awkwardness that is similar to the meeting of a white supremacist together with a black woman – (see the story in this month’s *The Mennonite* (April 2012 – *An Easter Story* by Isaac Villegas) about Ann Atwater, co-chair of group seeking to desegregate schools in Durham and C.P. Ellis, a leader in the Ku Klux Klan – it is an Easter story).

Peter was certainly uncomfortable, and so he asks Cornelius to tell him why he sent for him.

In response to Cornelius’ explanation – **Peter does not know what to do except to tell them about Jesus.**

**And THAT is the key point here**

– it is not about the comfort or discomfort of Peter or Cornelius  
– it is about the transforming work the Spirit of God is doing through the Story of Jesus, the life, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus in the Resurrection community.

The Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead – is the Spirit that is at work in this transforming work that takes place in Peter’s and Cornelius’ lives.

Peter does not get to set the terms of what the Spirit is about to do – all he can do is share Jesus.

**AND SO, Peter announces good news of peace through Jesus Christ – peace not through power, not through just war, not through Pax Romana, not through democratic principles, – it is peace that comes through Jesus Christ!**

Jesus is the One whom we gather around – to come to the Table of Jesus, to embrace and be embraced by Jesus

Jesus is the One who heals divisions, breaks down barriers, heals relationships, eradicates injustice, embraces the orphan, the widow, the alienated, the powerful, the oppressor and the oppressed, the just and the unjust.  
– shalom or peace is not left to our ability,  
– **shalom is the work of Jesus, and the Spirit of Jesus;**

Jesus is Lord of all – not Caesar, not Rome, no political power – not the Democrats or Republicans – Jesus is the Lord of all.

**And that is the Story we are called to tell and live as Resurrection people – in being led by the Spirit!**

And that is the Story we tell when we welcome all whom the Spirit brings into our midst – because all whom the Spirit brings are broken people – that is the only kind of people we are.

Chuck Neufeld was given a song to make his – and it expresses the welcomeness of the broken into the community of Christ.

### **All My Favorite People are Broken**

*Linford Detweiler — Copyright © 2010 Scampering Songs Publishing (ASCAP)*

All my favorite people are broken  
Believe me, my heart should know  
Some prayers are better left unspoken  
I just want to hold you and let the rest go

All my friends are part saint and part sinner  
We lean on each other, try to rise above  
We are not afraid to admit we are all still beginners  
We are all late bloomers when it comes to love

All my favorite people are broken  
Believe me, my heart should know  
Orphaned believers, skeptical dreamers, step forward  
You can stay right here, you don't have to go

Is each wound you've received just a burdensome gift  
It gets so hard to lift yourself up off the ground  
But the poet says we must praise a mutilated world  
We're all working the graveyard shift  
You might as well sing along

Cause all my favorite people are broken  
Believe me, my heart should know  
As for your tender heart, this world's going to rip it wide open,  
It ain't gonna be pretty, but you're not alone

All my favorite people are broken  
Believe me, my heart should know  
Orphaned believers, skeptical dreamers, you're welcome  
Yeah, you're safe right here, you don't have to go

Cause all my favorite people are broken

Believe me, I should know  
Some prayers are better left unspoken  
I just want to hold you and let the rest go

We are a community of the Spirit – **we welcome and receive the Spirit into our community**  
– and as a result we are called to welcome and receive all whom the Spirit brings to us because we are all broken.

Even as it stretches us beyond our comfort zones! – like Peter and Cornelius

As Mennonites, for sure we are comfortable with peacemakers coming into our midst, comfortable with those embracing Anabaptist ways, comfortable with those who are politically more to the left

– but how comfortable are we when God brings into our midst people who serve in the military (the Cornelius’), who are open to bring peace through Pax Americana  
– people from conservative evangelical traditions, who may be pro-life, rather than pro-choice  
– persons who are politically conservative, who would rather listen to Glen Beck, than Jim Wallis  
– people whose views about immigration policy is to arrest the undocumented;

**BUT ALSO**, those who are more conservative in our community, how comfortable are we when God brings into our midst

– people who are undocumented, living as aliens among us  
– or people whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual: gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender;  
As I look at what is going on in Acts 10, the bringing together of Peter and the centurion is an act of the Spirit; bringing together broken people to be transformed  
– nothing else can explain it.

### **It is a resurrection act!**

And it is not about one group setting a political or theological agenda for another group – it was not up to Peter to set the terms of their connecting, nor was it Cornelius’

The one who sets the terms for what happens when the Spirit brings whomever the Spirit desires to bring into our midst is the Spirit.

We do not get to tell the Spirit the manner of transformation that is to take place among us.

All we can do is receive the Spirit;

Receive those the Spirit brings into our midst;

Receive the transforming work the Spirit does in each of our lives!

**We are all called to be open to be transformed by the Spirit of God;**

**That is what it means to be a Resurrection community!**

- **A community of the Spirit!**

And that is why Peter tells Cornelius about Jesus

**Because it is all about Jesus! It is all centered in Jesus! It is all rooted in Jesus!**

Being formed into a resurrection community is all the work of the Spirit of God.

**God brings together a community that is unable to live together on its own**

–but in God bringing us together, creating a community out of us – which is what God is actually doing here at North Suburban – we in being open to the Spirit are learning to say – “Spirit of God, take hold of each one of us and transform us, not according to our agenda, but according to yours!”

And as Peter is speaking, “the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.

The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles

For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.”

Acts 10 is indeed an Easter Story!

**Well, you say – if that is true, how can we live out Easter every day in our lives – it is a living that is continually sensitive to the Spirit of God.**

1. Pray! Begin each day open to the Spirit and what the Spirit chooses to do in, through you.
2. Be aware that the Spirit works out the Spirit’s purpose in our lives – for us to live as a resurrection community.
3. Root yourself in the Story of God! This is how we begin to notice how God works in the world. When the story of God’s actions are familiar to us – we are more apt to see the Spirit of God at work in the world.
4. Ask the Spirit of God to help you notice what God is up to all around us.
5. Take action, in the presence of the Spirit – like Peter step out trusting the lead of the Spirit. Wherever you find yourself ask for courage to enter into a conversation – helps to begin with “hi, how are you” and then be open to notice what the Spirit brings about.
6. Keep doing this day by day. At first, it’s baby steps – but then you will become more adept to notice what the Spirit is bringing to your attention

**The Spirit-led life is the ultimate reorientation brought about through the resurrection of Jesus.**

**May it be our prayer – every day**

**To Live in the Power and presence of the Spirit of God – people being transformed by the Spirit of God – live in openness and response to the transformative moving of the Spirit in our lives and in the lives of others!**