

Resurrection People #1

Resurrection People Leave Beauty in their Wake

John 20:11-18

Good Morning Church Family and good morning to those of you who are joining us online today.

We're now two weeks past Easter Sunday. Whenever I preach an Easter Sermon, which is, of course, once a year, I think "Man, I really wish that I could preach Easter all the time." There's just something about that story, something about the hope it brings, something about redemption and resurrection that just gets me. When I turned my attention to sermon planning last week, I thought, "Wait, why can't I preach Easter every Sunday? Who's stopping me? Who among us couldn't use a little more of the Easter Hope and the Easter Promise with us right now?"

For the next month, I'll be preaching about what it means to be People of the Resurrection- folks who have been changed by the Good News, by the Risen Jesus, and aim to live into that hope. Each Sunday we'll talk about a different facet of being a Resurrection Person and what that means for each of us here in our daily lives.

Before we talk about this week's facet, I think it's important to be reminded about just how central the resurrection was for the early church and the formation of Christianity.

Jesus' miraculous, powerful defeat of death by rising again to life after three days is the lynchpin, if you will of the Gospel. Because Jesus did exactly what he said he would do in that tomb, then everything else he taught, he commanded and he promised is also true. Jesus is God in the flesh. Jesus is our Saviour in this life and in the life to come. Paul, in his letter to the church at Corinth reminds us of just how important the Resurrection is to our faith, "But tell me this—since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead? For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world." Some translations say, "If Christ has not been raised, we are miserable fools."

The Resurrection of Jesus is central. So now then, what does that mean for us? What qualities and characteristics mark us as Resurrection People?

Preston Pouteaux, who was the speaker at this year's MCSask ADS told a story about when he and his wife, Kelly, moved to Chestermere, Alberta. They were moving to Chestermere to help plant Lakeridge Community Church. Preston says that he and

Kelly bought a house there, the cheapest one that the builder offered for that neighbourhood. They moved into that new neighbourhood (which was still under construction), you know lots of dirt piles, construction vehicles, and all the stuff that goes along with developing a new neighbourhood. Preston said he stood on his front porch, looking out over the neighbourhood and he cried. Stood on the porch, tears running down his face, because there wasn't a single green thing as far as he could see. Not a single living tree, shrub, or even a blade of grass. It was so depressing. His wife Kelly came out of the house and found him on the porch, and asked what was wrong. He told her, look at this place, it's so depressing, nothing is green, nothing is growing, we've made a huge mistake moving here. And she said to him, "Preston, we (and her implication was as Christians, and Resurrection People) are the sort of people who leave beauty in our wake. We don't move into those places, we leave those places more beautiful". Isn't that the loveliest idea, Resurrection People leave beauty in their wake. We are called to make things more beautiful, more filled with life, as followers of Jesus.

In our story from scripture today, we get a glimpse of this making and leaving of beauty in Jesus' appearance to Mary. Mary is at the tomb and she's found it empty- the body of her Lord has disappeared. Stolen, taken, she assumes. Let's pick up in verse 14 , "When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

“Supposing him to be the gardener.” What a curious phrase, “Supposing him to be the gardener.” Now, I’ll say that I often glossed over that phrase when reading this section. Mary was distraught, understandably, so a case of mistaken identity didn’t seem unusual. And it wasn’t until Preston called attention to this phrase in his talk at ADS that I wondered, “Why did Mary think he was the gardener?” Preston posited that perhaps Mary mistook Jesus for a gardener because he was doing something that a gardener would do. Weeding. Water. Straightening up. Arranging plants. Covered in dirt or mud. Kneeling down. Arranging beauty. Making life. There’s something gorgeous about the idea that the first thing Jesus did following the Resurrection was to make beauty on this Earth- even as he secured beauty for us in the life to come.

I know the good people of this church to be prolific gardeners; I think I’ve toured most of them at this point, and my family has been the grateful recipients of some of the bounty from those gardens. It’s not a stretch then to imagine this whole World (the places, the people, the land, the stories) as God’s Garden and we as the faithful tenders of this soil, right here in this place, right here in Langham. As resurrection people, we are called to make beauty right here and now with Jesus.

As Resurrection people, we can try to imagine ourselves as joining Jesus in his role as a gardener in this world, as ones who leave beauty in our wake. Author Madeleine L’Engle in her book, *Walking on Water* says this, “Remember the root word of humble and human is the same: humus: earth. We are dust. We are created; it is God who made us and not we ourselves. But we were made to be co-creators with our maker.” I

love L'Engle's language that we are made to be co-creators with God. God is redeeming all things to himself, infusing beauty into a world marred by pain and sin, and we get to join with God in that.

So, what does it look like to be this kind of Resurrection People? To step into the barren places, the dry places, and to tend them, to plant beautiful things, to share the goodness of God's harvest with the world around us. Let's talk about some ways to do that together.

First, we need to turn outward. We need to pay attention to the people around us in our church and most especially in our neighbourhoods. This is especially true, I think, after over two long years of pandemic. The Public Health advice for so long was to close down, turn inward, and to "keep that bubble small." That was a necessary step to prevent the spread of covid and to protect vulnerable people, certainly, but I also see how that created a rut in my own life. It's hard to turn outward again, to stretch those muscles of neighbourliness, and how it all just feels like too much "work" to reach out. In my head I think, "I just want to be with MY people. It's easier." But Jesus stretches out my hands to our neighbourhood and says ALL these people are my people and they're your people now, "One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your

strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’] There is no commandment greater than these.” “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and **to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.**”

Secondly, we can choose to be about life. What I mean is that we can look for signs of life, look for beauty and goodness and rejoice in it. As resurrection people, we need to try to resist the temptation to see all that is wrong, and instead to look for beauty, meaning and truth in this place and time. I’m not talking about sticking our heads in the sand or ignoring the hard things in our lives or world, because that’s not an honest expression of faith, but I’m talking about looking for the light of God even in darkness. A line from one of my favourite worship songs is, “A certain sign of Grace is this, from the broken earth, flowers come up, pushing through the dirt.” Let’s notice life and celebrate it, even as we aim to cultivate life giving things in our communities. (Langham? Don’t write it off?)

Thirdly, resurrection people uproot the weeds in our lives. John 15 describes Jesus as a Master Gardener and us as the vines in the garden. Verse 2 says, “He cuts off every branch in me that doesn’t bear fruit, and every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes, that so that it will be even more fruitful.” Life with the Holy Spirit as our guide will mean that we are being pruned, our rough edges smoothed down, our weeds pulled up. And sometimes that will be painful, and and we almost always won’t like it. Sometimes we’ll

keep pulling up the same weeds over and over again, like the little elm tree in the corner of my garden that persistently sends up new shoots. Each of us has our own persistent weeds, I know I do. Any gardener will tell you that catching the weeds early and pulling them up when they're tiny is the way to go; don't wait until you have to squat down, lean back and yank them up with both hands, ripping the soil and the good plants in the process. So whether it's a conflict, an unkind word spoken, or some other spiritual weed that so easily entangles, let's pull them up when they're small. As any gardener will also tell you, if it's the growing season, there's always weeding to do.

Finally, we need to remember that gardening is slow work- it takes time, commitment and energy. My brother in law and sister in law moved to Saskatoon 5 and ½ years ago from Edmonton. They have a beautiful backyard with a prolific garden, but it's taken time. Each year add something else; do a little more -add another garden box, plant a shrub or two, mix in some more compost. The work leaving beauty in our wake is much like that of a garden- slow, faithful, a year over year commitment. A commitment to turning outward, and hearing people's stories. A commitment to choosing life, even when it seems the soil can grow nothing. A commitment to weeding out the sin, the thorns in our lives.

To close, I'll return to the story that Preston Pouteaux told, the one about his wife finding him crying on the porch as he looked out at the new neighbourhood. Inspired by his wife's reminder of "leaving beauty in our wake", he contacted a horticulturist friend to help him decide what to plant, how to bring life. Through their conversation, they

learned that nothing was growing because there were no bees. There were no pollinators to cause growth. So, now Preston and Kelly raise bees in their thriving backyard. He talks to school kids about bees and how important they are for life, and for all things. The idea caught on and more and more people got backyard bees and planted Pollinator Gardens and now, Chestermere Alberta is Western Canada's First Bee City as they protect pollinators and spread life, leaving beauty in their wake.

How can we leave Langham a little more beautiful this month, and this year? I hope we can talk about that together.

Let's pray.