

“Knowing God’s Possibilities”

April 5, 2015

The God We Can Know series – Easter Sunday

Today we’re confronted with death. Yes, it’s Easter. It’s resurrection day, but first, before the joy and celebration, we’re confronted with death. We’ve been making our way through this series on THE GOD WE CAN KNOW, and finally we get to the good part.

But to get here, we had to go through the hard part. Remember last Sunday when we waved palms, but then soon enough, our waving arms came down, and we heard the words of Peter and Judas and so many others. Words of betrayal and denial. Words of death.

So, honestly, the Good News that we receive today is for all those who have ever had to deal with death. For all those who have had to face the death of someone they loved, for all of us, this is our story. For some of us, that experience is incredibly recent. For many of us, the death may not be so recent, but it’s fresh. It is our common experience.

Mary Magdalene was grieving when she came to the garden that morning, ready to prepare Jesus’ body. When she came to the tomb where Jesus’ body had been placed, she was even more grieved when she thought someone had taken his body. There was no other possibility until she heard Jesus call her name, and we know the rest of the story.

But if we go back a bit in John’s Gospel, we know that Jesus was grieving when he found out that Lazarus was dead. Lazarus’ sisters and family had watched him decline. Their grief was deep and painful. Martha was grieving, too. Where were you? She asks Jesus why he hadn’t been there.

It’s in that moment that Jesus offers another statement and promise about who he is. “I am the resurrection and I am life.” Now I’ll be honest, to talk about resurrection is difficult. It’s mysterious. It’s one of those things we believe, but it’s hard to explain. Martha believed in resurrection - a concept that was a part of Jewish thought. It was what she had been taught to believe. But perhaps it was more of an idea than a reality.

But his words go beyond believing in resurrection. He says that he is the resurrection. He is the life. It is in him that we find hope beyond this life. It’s in him that we find joy and peace. But resurrection implies that something happens - something changes. Something is different. God is doing something new. God is making something possible that seemed impossible.

So Jesus asks Martha if she believes him. Does she trust him? Do we trust him? All through this season of Lent, we've focused on Jesus who says "I am" and offers us satisfaction, guidance, care, and power - all those things we say we want, but try to find on our own. Today we gather on Easter morning. There's something about Easter. There's something about hope. There's something about new life. There's something about resurrection.

Keep on reading in John 11. Lazarus comes out of the tomb very much alive. Jesus performs a miracle, and it's amazing, but it's also a significant turning point in his life and ministry. From here, the tension grows. Lazarus is even targeted because he's the object of Jesus' miracle. Lazarus will not live forever, but the work that Jesus does, the power that he shows, the glory of God that he displays, brings hope and possibility.

We want to trust that God can bring new possibilities when we can't see them. We want to trust that God can do what is impossible - that God can bring joy where there was sorrow, potential where there was problems, forgiveness where there's none, healing where there's sickness, relationship where there's disconnection.

It's still mysterious to us - how it all happened. But what we can be sure of is that something was different. Mary Magdalene heard her name called from the lips of her Savior, and life was never the same. Martha trusted in Jesus. Lazarus came out of the tomb. He was resuscitated - brought back to life - but this miracle showed the power of resurrection - to trust God to do more than what we see is possible.

Jesus went to the cross, but that wasn't the end. He died and was buried, but that wasn't the end. That's the real possibility and promise. Grief is real - absolutely! Resurrection happened, and it changed everything. This isn't just about overcoming death; it's about what we do because of it! What are the possibilities because of God's grace and love? What is your story of how God offered possibilities?

Life wasn't the same after Jesus' resurrection. The disciples became powerful witnesses of faith. Their words invited thousands more to trust in Jesus. And we gather here today because of them and all who came after them. It's incredible, isn't it - what God can do - what is possible?

I think about people who live in the joy of resurrection now. People who live with the assurance of God's grace at work in their lives even as they face the most difficult loss or struggle. People who accept God's grace fully and offer it freely. People who trust in the hope that God offers even when the next step is unknown or uncertain. People who stand strong and profess faith in God who makes a way where there seems to be no way.

The Easter story isn't just for when we think about eternal life. It's for life on this side of the grave, too! Resurrection isn't something we talk about just when we face

death. God is bringing new possibilities all the time! God is at work all the time to bring us closer to Jesus and make us new.

But that's the trouble. Rob Fuquay reminds us that sometimes we'd like God just to do the work of resuscitation, not resurrection. God, just take us back to how it was. Make it like it used to be. We want God to work on our terms. We'll maybe trust God - but just *with* our wants. We still want control. That still leaves us fearful and unfulfilled.

But, friends, God is in the business of resurrection. God wants us to trust him *for* our wants. God is always doing something new. God is transforming us into what God wants us to be - more like Christ - less fearful more humble, more trusting. And that means taking us along with him into a new future - not taking us back to where we were. When Lazarus came out of the tomb, Jesus didn't send him back in. Jesus said, "Unbind him, and let him go." There was a new future for Lazarus - possibilities!

It's easy, friends, but it's an incredible journey. It's not without disappointment, pain, and heartache. But I hope we hear what Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and I am life." "I am" doesn't mean "I have been." God hasn't even left or given up on me or you. That's good because there are times I'd have given up on me! Today when we celebrate resurrection - and every day - is the right time to trust in God who is "I am."

If you've ever felt like God let you down, or didn't come through for you in the way you wanted, hear the promise that it doesn't mean God isn't coming through! God is "I am" - a present reality - right now. God isn't off in the future waiting for you to get it right or in order so you can have a relationship with him. You don't have to tip the faith scale one way or another for God. God doesn't say, "I will be." God says, "I am." God loves, cares, guides, and helps right now. Today is the time to open ourselves to God's presence again - or for the first time.

This table is open to all who seek to follow Christ. You don't have to have it all figured out. You just have to come with an open heart and a willing spirit - ready to live in the joy of resurrection - ready to experience new life. I hope that's all of us today.

Thanks be to God! AMEN.

BAPTISM:

God is involved

Community is involved and important - their own witness

Outward showing of an inward work

Michael and Ashley commit to raise him up in Christ

I am who I am - is God enough for us?

I am the bread of life - satisfaction

I am the light of the world - guidance
I am the gate and Good Shepherd - care
I am the vine - power
I am the way, the truth, and the life - way
I am the resurrection and the life - possibilities