

*Three Points*

There was a time when seminarians were taught that a good sermon has three points a poem. I normally don't read poetry from the pulpit. But today's lesson does make three points that I would like to expound on a bit.

The first point is the importance of regular worship attendance for a Christian. The Jews in Jesus day, and today, worshipped on the Sabbath Day, the seventh day, which is Saturday. The women found the empty tomb and Jesus first appeared to his disciples on a Sunday, the first day of the week. In our culture we usually lump Saturday and Sunday together as "the weekend," and we consider Monday, the first day of the typical workweek, to be the first day of the week, but it's really Sunday. The first day of the week, Sunday, has become the Sabbath for us.

On that first Sunday after the Resurrection, Jesus' disciples gathered in fear and confusion in that Upper Room. This was where they had celebrated the Passover, and Jesus instituted the sacrament of Holy Communion, just a few nights before. The disciples were afraid because they thought the authorities might do to them what they had done to Jesus. They were confused because they had the report of the women about the empty tomb and they didn't know what to make of it. Much to their surprise, the resurrected Jesus appeared to them there. When they came together the day after the Jewish Sabbath, in the place where the Lord's Supper had taken place, the risen Jesus was there in the midst of them. It was like a brand new day, an eighth day of the week, to them.

Thomas, we are told, was absent from that Sunday gathering for some reason. Can you imagine being Thomas: the biggest event in human history, Jesus coming back from the dead, and all your friends are there, and you're not! What a lost opportunity! Fortunately for Thomas he didn't make that mistake again. Although he was skeptical, he was there the next week, that next Sunday, in that Upper Room. You can imagine that the disciples were probably eating and drinking and talking about Jesus. Right on schedule, and as he promised (because Jesus had said that, "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name there I am in the midst of them.") Jesus appeared to them once again. This time Thomas not only saw Jesus but he got to touch him. Imagine seeing and touching Jesus!

What we do here in our worship each Sunday, and once a month at "gladsound" on a Saturday, is exactly like what the disciples did in the Upper Room on that first Easter and the subsequent weeks. We, who are often afraid and confused, gather in Christ's name. We hear the story of Jesus crucified and risen, and we share in the sacred meal. And the risen Christ is here among us. He is in his Word. He is in the bread and wine. He is in the community of believers. In those ways we see and touch Him. Christ is here among us and no one should miss that as Thomas did the first time around.

As Christians we need to have our faith nurtured and affirmed by the Word and sacrament. We need to be blessed by and be a blessing to our brothers and sisters in the faith. We need that kind of presence of Christ in our lives. People often comment to me about the disparity of attendance between

Easter Sunday and the Sunday after Easter. I can only say that I am thankful for those who worshipped on Easter and I pray that the blessing they received in that service is something they will want to come back and experience again soon.

Our second point, that Christ alone is Lord. When “Doubting Thomas” came to faith he proclaimed Jesus to be “My Lord and my God.” What do you think Thomas meant by that? Was Jesus only his Lord and God, and other people could have other lords and gods, or do think Thomas meant that Jesus is the one and only Lord and God. I have to go with the later, that Jesus is the universal Lord, that he is the one God in unity with the Father and the Spirit. That was quite a theological leap for Thomas. The Jews understanding of the commandment not allowing any image to be made representing God would have prohibited as blasphemous the idea that any man could be God’s Son. Thomas was stepping out into new territory by declaring Jesus to be God in human flesh, the one and only Lord of humanity.

That Jesus alone is Lord is not a position that is popular today. Political correctness tells us that all religions are created equal. Multiculturalism tells us that we cannot judge one set of beliefs as superior to another. There is much pressure on us today to say that religion is merely a matter of personal preference and that we must accept that all beliefs are valid and that all deities are valid, if not actually one and the same just under different names. That is not my position and I don’t think that should ever be the position of the church.

While there may be some truth in all the great religions, God is never without witnesses in any time and place, I would not say that all the different religions are just different pathways to the same god. Jesus Christ is unique among all the world's great religious leaders and among all the other candidates for Supreme Divine Being. We could praise Jesus' teaching, and miracles, and other aspects of his life and personality, but the final criterion that separates Jesus from all the other contenders and pretenders is his Resurrection from the dead. No other human being can make a credible claim to that. All the other great religious figures of the past are sleeping in their graves. Only Jesus lives to die no more, and he would be the Lord and God of all if only for that reason alone.

Our third point, Jesus gives us a preview of the resurrected life. Some of the world's ancient religions had a "Book of the Dead" describing the afterlife in great detail and supposedly helping one navigate that afterlife. We Christians don't have anything like that, and in some ways that's a pity. People have so many questions about the world to come; it would be nice if we could give them a book explaining it all. But God has chosen not to do that. Why not? I don't claim to know God's mind on all things, but it seems like the joys of Heaven are so far beyond anything we have known on earth that it defies description in human words. Our limited earthly minds just can't comprehend yet the glory God has planned for us.

However, God has given us just a few glimpses, just a couple clues, as to what our eternity with Him will be like. Many of us think of Heaven as being some ethereal existence as pure spirit or pure energy or some such thing. That's not what the Bible shows us. Each week in the Creed we

confess belief in the resurrection of the body. St. Paul tells us that we will have bodies in Heaven, glorious resurrection bodies. He says we will have bodies like Christ's resurrected body. What do we know about Jesus' resurrected body? Our gospel reading today gives us some information.

On one hand, Jesus' body was the same as it was before he died. He still had arms and legs and fingers and toes. It was a physical body that could be touched. He still looked like the Jesus the disciples had known. He even still had the wounds of his crucifixion present. But on the other hand, it was a different kind of body than the disciple had ever seen. Jesus could appear and disappear at will. He could walk through locked doors. He was changed somehow. Personally, although there are many things about my body now that I don't like, I'm glad to know that in Heaven I will have a body, but a far better body than I have now. I just won't be some disembodied spirit floating who knows where. And I'm glad to know that you and I will see Jesus face-to-face, the Savior we have loved and served, even as Thomas did so long ago.

John concluded his gospel by saying that if everything Jesus did and said were written down, the whole world could not contain all the books. Well, that's our three points for today. I hope you'll come back to hear more next Sunday. Amen.