

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
305 EAST MAIN STREET
DURHAM, NC 27701
PHONE: (919) 682-5511



“Make Disciples; Made Apostles”

A sermon by Marilyn T. Hedgpeth

2nd Sunday of Easter

May 1, 2011

Ps. 16; 1 Pet. 1:3–9; Jn. 20:19–31

What does the resurrection mean, once we've had time
to go back home and think about it in the context of our everyday lives?

What does the resurrected Lord require of us?

Is it different than what the unresurrected Lord required of us:

to seek justice, to love kindness, to walk humbly with our God? (Micah
6:8)

Shel Silverstein, in his book *Where the Sidewalk Ends*,

has a wonderful little poem that speaks of the primal fear

that can paralyze even the most faithful believer in times of change, called:

I Won't Hatch

Oh I am a chickie who lives in an egg,

but I will not hatch, I will not hatch.

The hens they all cackle, the roosters all beg,

but I will not hatch, I will not hatch.

For I hear all the talk of pollution and war

As the people all shout and the airplanes all roar,

So I'm staying in here where it's safe and it's warm,

And I WILL NOT HATCH!

(Silverstein, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, New York: Harper Collins, 1974, p. 127)

The last we heard from the disciples in John's Gospel
is that they are on their way back
to their individual homes that Easter Sunday morning,
after having distantly observed the crucifixion of their leader, Jesus, three days prior;
and after having heard mention of his leave-taking from the tomb
by a highly-disturbed woman,
and strange confirmation of this by Simon Peter and one other inner-circle disciple.

And now it is Sunday evening, of that same Easter day,
and they regroup for debriefing, as disciples, as a leaderless body,
as sheep without a shepherd,
hunkered down behind locked doors, padlocked by fear.

Today we might say they are in their safety room,
the place we might designate in our homes to go when the tornado warning
sounds;
the place closest to the center of our home, which we have stockpiled
with bottled water, flashlights, a battery-powered radio, duct-tape,
tarps, blankets, and canned food.

The disciples are in their safety room, huddled together,
paralyzed by panic, breathlessly waiting what might next
be required of them, once the Jesus-storm of controversy clears.

John's Gospel says they are behind locked doors because they are afraid of the Jews.

I think they are afraid of one particular Jew: Jesus, their rabbi, or teacher.
If you had been complicit in the death of your best friend and mentor;
if you had slept through his anguish; if you had denied ever knowing him;
if you had been present at his arrest, but unable to resist or deter it;
if you had witnessed his lynching at the hands of an angry mob,
but had skirted the crowd to avoid the worst of it;

and now, if you had heard that he is no longer where they laid him—buried him—
sealed him in for eternity with a heavy boulder, but is risen;
indeed... wouldn't you be scared... breathless?
Wouldn't you be afraid to move; afraid to hatch;
afraid of what might be required of you next?
Change is in the air, and change can be a very frightening prospect—
even good change.

But what do they, the disciples, know at this point, I want to ask?

Well, they know what it means to be *a disciple*.

Mathetes – the Greek word for disciple – means a student, a learner,
a pupil, an apprentice, an adherent, a confirmand,
and in this context, a follower of Jesus.

It means to sit at the feet of a teacher and learn from his or her instruction;

it means to absorb wisdom and discipline, and with it to acquire understanding.

It means attachment to a movement, and to a group of people committed

to a movement instigated by a discipler, in this case, Jesus, the discipler.

It means to follow Jesus, their discipler, in order to become fishers of men and women.

Jesus, was once, himself, a disciple of John the Baptist.

But then the Holy Spirit dove towards him like a dove in baptism,

and his own teacher/leader was brutally murdered, and Jesus, himself,
became a discipler, one in the business of making and leading other disciples.

At some point, disciples have the opportunity to hatch

and possibly become disciplers themselves, it seems.

The disciples must realize this at some level.

But their teacher, Jesus, has not only been murdered,

he also has been raised, and they are not sure about their next step.

And so they incubate in fear behind those locked doors.

I think we Presbyterians, myself included,

are well acquainted with this particular form of paralyzation;

after all, we are well-known by others as "the frozen chosen."

We love to learn. We love to sit at the feet of good teachers.

We love to be knocked over by exceptionally profound preachers.

We love to teach our children well; to instruct them in the faith; to catechize them; to bring them to the point of confirmation; to establish and operate excellent colleges and institutions of higher education; to form task forces and study issues at length.

But when it comes to that next step, that praxis of what we have learned, we often find ourselves frozen in place, paralyzed by a tyranny of choices as to how to break out of our shell and strut our stuff.

So, what else do Jesus' disciples know?

As good Jews themselves, the disciples know that the word "resurrection" in Hebrew and in Greek, derives from words that have to do with being lifted up. Someone could resurrect you, lift you up, if you had fallen down, or someone could resurrect you, lift you up if you had fallen asleep, for instance.

I think it's interesting that in our baptismal vows to the children of the church, we ask, "When this child falls, will you pick her up?"

That's resurrection language we are using in the baptismal service!

Maybe we should also ask,

"When this child falls asleep during the sermon, will you also wake him up?"

As disciples of the Hebrew Scriptures, the original disciples would know that the Old Testament prophets

alluded to something like this resurrection event;

that the mighty power of God is such that

a man like Jonah might sit in deep darkness in the belly of a great fish for three days and three nights, and then be

belched back onto dry land to walk away and tell about it.

And that the prophet Hosea referred to the restoration of a repentant Israel
by saying: "In two days He will make us whole again;
on the third day He will raise us up,
and we shall be whole by His favor" (Hosea 6:2).

They would have viewed this resurrection as an eschatological sign pointing beyond
itself:

God's breath-taking beginning to a final shake-down of justice.
foretold by the prophets, and fulfilled by Jesus.

The fair-shake in life for all of God's people was about to become a real possibility.

They would have viewed Jesus' resurrection as the first fruit

of a general resurrection which would follow soon on its heels;
a sign that the final in-gather and judgment was at hand,
and that the new age or kingdom was at their doorstep.

Any wonder that they keep the door locked?

Any wonder that they were okay with being justice-seekers, disciples of justice,
but now fearful of being sent out to be justice-doers in God's post-resurrection
world?

To remain in a state of arrested development is much more comfortable and trendy.

To ask for a grade of incomplete in a task force study of places
where justice is lacking is certainly tempting.

After all, it's daunting to believe that one might be called up, lifted up, woken up,
to take action against violence,

to take action against torture,

to take action against human trafficking,

to take action against hunger,

to take action on behalf of mental illness,

to take action against discrimination,

to take action on behalf of tornado victims.

To know "resurrection" as the original disciples should have discerned,

is to know that the calling to be justice-doers now lies just over the threshold.

But then Jesus, himself, comes and stands among them,
except that he's not exactly like his old self,
but he bears a remarkable resemblance to the man formerly known as
Jesus.

He speaks words of peace, words of relationship to the Father, as Jesus once spoke;
and he breathes, inhaling and exhaling, as only someone truly human might do.

He comes among them, risen, with visible, tangible post-mortem flesh,
bearing the signature marks of the mortally-wounded Christ;
the nail impressions on his hands, the sword slash in his side.

But it is clear that his resurrected body is not merely a resuscitated corpse;
it is a transformed body.

It is a "transphysical body", as Theologian NT Wright has termed it:

it is corporeal, but it is able to transcend normal bodily limitations,
like locks, doors, walls, and even human fear.

(NT Wright. *The Resurrection and the Son of God*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 2003)

Jesus, himself, comes and stands among them with words of peace and comfort
to counter their fear and apprehension.

And then John says Jesus does something quite remarkable:

he sends them, breathes on them, and commissions them.

With the life-giving breath of the Holy Spirit, speaking in imperatives,
Jesus galvanizes and charges his disciples to hatch as new creations,
as agents of justice, joy, peace, and forgiveness;
as believers that violence, abuse of power, humiliation, even death itself
can never have the last word; that in the end, love finally will conquer all.

I believe that the post-Easter Jesus, the resurrected transformed Jesus,
blows the breath of the Holy Spirit on the disciples, and transforms them
from disciples into apostles.

The word *apostolos*, in Greek, means one who is sent out, one who is commissioned

to transmit a message or to carry out instructions of the commissioning agent.
Jesus says to the disciples in that inner sanctum,

"As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you."

And then he breathes on them and transforms them/us from disciple/learners,
to apostle/doers.

He breathes his God-words of commissioning on all of them in John's Gospel,
on the whole cadre of disciples,

on the major and minor players; even on Judas, the betrayer.

Jesus worked hard in the making of disciples; and now, by the power of the
Holy Spirit, they are made into apostles, to be sent out beyond the doors
of their fears, as agents of peace, joy, justice and forgiveness
into a storm-tossed world.

Hence, it is no small thing when we recite the Apostles' Creed in worship;
the baptismal creed of the ancient church, written around 200 CE,
affirming what the disciples were coming to realize that Easter evening,
that "on the third day he rose again from the dead."

It is a creedal declaration of the status of Jesus as Lord in the eyes of all disciple-
believers.

But it is also a creedal declaration of our status as disciples,
who have been instructed in the faith of our fathers and mothers,
just as we have instructed our Confirmation Class, whom we will
be recognizing this morning;
having baptized them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
and having taught them to obey everything that Jesus has commanded.

We have done that. *We* have spent years making disciples of them.

But it is God, the sender, *it is Jesus*, the risen discipler,

it is the breath of *the Holy Spirit*, only;

only the divine breath of joy and justice, peace and forgiveness,

that makes apostles of them or of any of us,

and compels us to hatch as new creations in Christ.

In this aspect, the Apostles' Creed is a prayer, that in the drama of divine salvation,
God will choose to deploy us disciple-servants to do his bidding.

It is into this hope, that we bless our Confirmation Class this morning.

And it is into this hope that we affirm our faith each week, as disciples
willing to hatch and rehatch, according to God's will,

and to be sent out in loving service to meet the world's greatest needs. Amen.