Easter 2 Sermon - St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church

Pastor Allison Bengfort - April 7, 2024

Before attending seminary, I worked as a social worker in Minneapolis. During that time, I served as a Victim Advocate at a center for people who had experienced sexual violence. The center had a Crisis Phone Line, where people could call and ask questions, get help, and find support. Victim/survivors often called this line when they were in the midst of a wave of PTSD and needed help getting re-grounded. I remember one conversation I had with a victim/survivor who was struggling to find hope.

I remember that she called only a few months after she had been assaulted, and she was struggling to stay afloat as she was bombarded with terrifying flashbacks, piercing emotional pain, complex grief, self-loathing, and body disassociation. “It doesn’t seem like this is ever going to go away,” she said. “I’m in so much pain all the time. It doesn’t seem like life is ever going to be okay again.” It made sense that she felt this way. The trauma she experienced was more than I could imagine, and it was life and soul shattering. She went on to ask me if it was actually possible to be healed. “Is it even possible to get through this?” she asked. “Can I ever actually feel better?”

It was a hard question. Honestly, I was with her in doubting whether a person in her situation could ever be okay again. I answered the question as best as I could. I told her what I had been told by others. I told her that people like her had come through our center before. That there were people who had experienced horrible things, and had come through that trauma and now lived fulfilling lives. Even as I said it, I knew it sounded so feeble. It was just a tiny, fragile whisper of hope in the midst of a storm of pain. It didn’t seem like enough. I found myself wishing that I had someone on the phone with me. Someone I could introduce her to who had experienced a level of trauma that matched hers. Someone who could share the story of her deep wounds and also demonstrate that they had found life on the other side of that trauma. A beautiful life to live even with the wounds she still carried. Someone who could say, “Put your finger here, on the wounds of my body. Reach out and touch the wounds of my soul. Do not doubt, but believe that healing is possible.”

Even with deep, piercing wounds, resurrection is possible. Caught in the midst of a complicated web of pain, it can be hard to see the way out.

In today’s gospel, the disciples are locked behind closed doors. They are locked in by fear. Fear that like they did with Jesus, the authorities will come for them. And locked in by their grief and trauma. Their friend and leader has been brutalized and executed. They are also confused and in the dark. Jesus’ body has disappeared from the tomb. Mary has seen Jesus, but we don’t know what the rest of the disciples made of that.

In the midst of this locked room, which is surrounded by darkness, Jesus appears and offers peace. In a room closed in with fear, grief, and confusion, Jesus says, “Peace be with you.” And then, he shows them his wounds. “Peace be with you. I have been wounded, and I have also been raised.” As Christians, this is the ultimate source of our peace. We can be at peace because we know, even when we are in the throes of pain, that resurrection is possible. Jesus, the bearer of every kind of suffering and death, including even a literal, physical death, has been raised. This means that nothing – absolutely nothing – can get in the way of God’s work of healing. Healing is always possible.

Now, I want to get a little more specific about what healing involves. Healing is not the same thing as undoing what has happened. Some people make a distinction between healing and curing, which *can* be helpful in understanding this. If you think of a physical disease, especially a disease that has no cure – diabetes for example – the difference between “healing” and “curing” becomes apparent. To cure diabetes would be to *erase* diabetes. A cure would mean that the person no longer has the disease. If the person developed diabetes during their lifetime, it would be like going back to the way things were before. Going back to a body free of this disease.

This is not resurrection. This is time travel. Even diseases that *can* be cured never leave the body exactly the same as it was before. Nothing is ever undone.

In our gospel today, we see clearly that the resurrected body of Jesus is not the same as his pre-torture body. This resurrected body bears wounds. In the resurrection, death is not undone, but it is overcome.

I attended a seder meal a few years ago at one of my favorite synagogues. As part of the seder, the leaders had each person in attendance take a piece of matzah. We each broke our matzah in half, and we were told to set it aside and not eat it – which was difficult because I was really hungry and it was very good matzah. But I did it, and later in the service, they asked us to pick up our two pieces of matzah and try to put them back together again. Matzah is the unleavened bread, so it’s kind of like a cracker. You can kind of fit the pieces back together. I was pretty proud of myself because I was able to fit my two pieces back together and then hold the whole thing by one side corner, and it all stayed together. But, even though it all stayed together, you could still see that there was a crack down the middle. As we held our pieces of broken matzah together, the leader spoke the following words:

“In reuniting these pieces, we affirm that while brokenness caused cannot be undone, it can be repaired.”

Resurrection. Two pieces of broken matzah put back together again.

Today, I’m thinking about that woman who called on the crisis line. I’m thinking about how she is much like Thomas, doubting that it’s possible to come back from such extreme trauma. I’m thinking about how she was locked up by fear and darkness and pain. How she could not see the way out. And then I think of Jesus, saying, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” And I hope and pray that that woman was able to do that. That she was able to believe that there was a way forward, even though she couldn’t see it. That she was able to trust that resurrection was possible for her, wounds and all.

People of God, there is new life to be had. Peace be with you.