

Pastor Roy's Sermon from April 24, 2016

Christ is Risen. [He is risen, indeed! Alleluia] We have 4 snapshots of what it means that Christ is risen.

Acts: Risen Christ/Spirit brings a new way of looking at Gentile strangers. Gentiles gave the Jews a bad feeling inside—as in a major case of stranger danger. They were unclean, ungodly, without any faith. They were almost more animal than human, if they were honest. The odd thing is that the more religious one was, the more of a bad feeling those folks had about the Gentiles. Isn't that odd? And yet this is human nature. If we feel we are right and others are wrong, then without even intending to, we dehumanize the other, the stranger, the foreigner. We have to go out of our way to seek God in those who are not like us. It's as if we have to prove to ourselves that they are just as beloved by God as we are. They are also children of God. . . or we will find ourselves believing they are children of evil, and we will act on that belief in a manner which has nothing to do with the love of Christ.

Back to the book of Acts: What became of these Jewish followers of Jesus who thought they were welcome in God's presence and non-Jews were alien and unwelcome. Peter has a vision of hunger, unclean animals, and the voice of God saying, over and over, "What God has made clean, you must not call dirty."

When Gentiles came requesting Peter to come with them and share the gospel of Christ's love, he did. When the Spirit filled them immediately with God's presence and courage just as the apostles had been filled at Pentecost, Peter knew that God was acting in a new way and it was his job to listen and follow. And the apostles responded, "God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life."

Christ is Risen . . .

His rising sets us free to love all people and welcome all people to the table of mercy. To offer and receive welcome is rich indeed. Judgment rightly belongs to God. And God's judgment is consistently for life, hope—for reconciliation. There are no strangers in the presence of God—there are no enemies. God creates. God embraces. God welcomes. The Gentiles are welcomed into the fold of the Jews. What Gentiles exist in our world which we are unable to welcome for fear of offending God or our communities of faith?

Psalms 148 confesses the wideness of God's mercy, that all creation worships and praises God. The heavens, angels, sun, moon, and stars, the waters, sea creatures, the elements which fulfill their purposes, landscapes, all plants and animals, humanity—the powerful, the poor, all ages, all callings give praise to God as they were created to do and be. Strength and praise are granted to all in their own way to worship God.

Jesus Christ is risen. . . His resurrection is a sign, it proclaims that all creation worships God and no evil, or death, or misunderstanding, or accident can separate any of us, any of creation from worshiping, from praising the God, the Life which holds it all together.

John in Revelation reveals the risen Christ as a new heaven and earth, without any evil or death or separation or lostness or disappointment. This newness is creation as God's home. Incarnation. God present not just in Jesus, but as every aspect of creation is caught up into beauty and wholeness, and wonder—into true unity and love. In John's vision, the One who gathers up all things in communion and mercy is the beginning and end of all. This One offers water to all who thirst. Are you thirsty? Drink from this spring which never runs dry, which always brings new life, which always has hope? How is this possible that we can find such living water? John calls to us to keep searching, keep seeking—and we will find. But only if we refuse to give up. Only if we demand the truth of the matter and refuse to settle for half-truths and well intentioned untruths.

How do we know the difference? Remember Peter's vision and new direction in Acts? The Spirit was found among the dreaded Gentiles. The Spirit made it obvious for anyone who was paying attention. Peter and the Apostles could not deny the Spirit in the Gentiles. The Gentiles were welcomed at the table. Who is thirsty in Dillsburg? Who is the Spirit calling us to welcome? Are we listening to the Spirit who cannot be denied? Let us receive the water and share it with our neighbor.

Christ is risen in the Gospel of John. We too are risen as we follow his commandment to love one another. What does it mean to love one another? What did it mean for Jesus to love us? He gave up his precious life. He decided that respect was more important than his own comfort. Calling for justice for those who had no seat at the table was more important than whether or not he was able to enjoy the feast.

And so Jesus offers us to drink from the water of life, the water of justice, the water of opportunity for those whom we have not taken the time to know and love.

The Spirit is calling us to listen. To see this risen Lord in the eyes of those whom we fear, in those whom we are pretty sure God is not. We serve a God who is full of surprises. God give us courage to offer this living water to the least among us in Dillsburg, and in this world. Amen.