

“So What?”
Psalm 133; John 20:19-22
Sermon
4/8/18

My kids disliked it, as much when their Mom or I said it, as I did when either one of my parents said it. It is a terse two word response often used when one of us having said or done something out of keeping with family expectations, said “I’m sorry.” “So what?” We all knew those two words were filled with meaning. We knew what was coming. So what if you say you’re sorry? What are you planning to do to correct the behavior? How do you plan on not doing it again? It is fine to offer an apology, but that is only the beginning. Words are just words until they are followed by actions. All of that summed up in these two words, *so what?*

That training kicked into high gear the other day as I met with colleagues for lunch. The question haunted me as we shared our Easter worship experience with each other. All of us had higher than usual attendance. Most of us had special music. Some had trumpets blaring, drums beating, sacred dance, and other liturgical flourishes related to this special day. Yet when all was said and done, *so what?*

Were any lives changed, any hearts touched? If so, would the change have any lasting effect? Would the announcement *He is risen* have real life consequences for anyone? One would hope so but, as was implied when the *so what* was offered as a response to behaviors, we’ll wait and see. It is a similar response I’ve had when singing *They’ll know we are Christians by our love*. How often these words remain only words until actions demonstrate otherwise.

Did you pay attention to the Psalm we read this morning? Strange imagery in our day, but vivid.

***How good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity!
It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down the beard of Aaron,
running down over the collar of his robe.***

Like sacred oil, used in anointing, God’s blessing has consequences. It flows freely with abandon. It affects every part of the one receiving it. With that in mind and heart, return with me to our Gospel passage this morning. The gospel writer of John has recounted the resurrection, clearly a blessing. Jesus has made his living presence known to Mary Magdalene, and to Simon Peter and another disciple. Mary

Magdalene has told the other disciples she has seen the risen Christ. It makes for a great story, but ***So what?*** It would be easy to assume the disciples have such a sense of overwhelming joy when they hear the news that they run into the streets and whoop it up. Who would not understand and get caught up in the excitement and joy. You might easily assume, like precious oil, the joy would be spreading everywhere. But listen to John's commentary.

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear... The disciples have locked themselves in, for fear of the Jewish leaders. In and of itself, the fear is likely understandable. But the disciples now already know God has had, and will have, the last word. The resurrection, no matter how we understand it, is a statement that the powers of the world are temporary and the power of God is eternal. You would suppose that awareness would erase all fear. But it did not and does not.

Just a short week after we celebrated on Easter Sunday, here we are. We heard the announcement, ***He is risen!*** We have affirmed it as being the truth. And so I think it is fair to ask the question. ***So what?*** So what is different about us? Are we living more faithfully, more hopefully? Are we running, as it were, in the streets shouting the good news? Or are we back in the same rut of despair over the present, acting as if the future has not been opened to us? Are we locking ourselves away from the dangers of the moment, allowing ourselves to believe nothing can be done to change ourselves, our families, our nation, our world, our church?

If even a small part of ourselves resonates with the question, hear it again. ***So what,*** in light of John's telling of the resurrection and its aftermath? For it does not have to end behind closed doors, behind fear and misgiving.

Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced...Jesus said again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'

That, my friends, is meant to be the ***So what*** of Easter. For Easter calls us from our fear into action. ***As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*** Easter, when it truly happens, leads us away from locked doors to an open embrace of the world and its people, even as Jesus did. Easter calls us to be the living, flesh bearing, presence of God, the fulfilled promise of triumph over evil. It calls us to new life as disciples of the one who showed the utter failure of human sin, of human weakness and fear, to win out. Fred Buechner, one of my favorite theologians and writers, in his book,

The Alphabet of Grace, speaks of what I believe needs to be said about the Resurrection and its *So what?*

õWe can say that the story of the Resurrection means simply that the teachings of Jesus are immortal like the plays of Shakespeare or the music of Beethoven and that their wisdom lives on forever. Or we can say that the Resurrection means that the spirit of Jesus is undyingí or we can say that the language in which the Gospels describe the Resurrection of Jesus is the language of poetry and that, as such it is not to be taken literally but as pointing to a truth more profound than the literal. Very often, I think this is the way that the Bible is writtení but in the case of the Resurrection, this simply does not apply because there is really no story about the Resurrection in the New Testament. Except in the most fragmentary way, it is not described at all. There is no poetry about it. Instead, it is simply proclaimed as a fact, Christ is risen! In fact, the very existence of the New Testament itself proclaims it. Unless something very real indeed took place on that strange, confused morning, there would be no New Testament, no Church, no Christianity.

Yet we try to reduce it to poetry anyway: the coming of Spring with the return of life to the dead earth, the rebirth in the despairing soul. We try to suggest that these are the miracles that the Resurrection is all about, but they are not. In their own way they are all miracles, but they are not this miracle, this central one to which the whole Christian faith points.õ

You see, my friends, the central proclamation of our faith is simply this, *He is risen!* It is this announcement that calls us to answer, *So what?* May we have the right answer because so much depends on how we do. It determines who we are and who we become. It determines how we live in the world. It determines if we unlock the doors of fear, of inaction, born of despair and hopelessness. *He is risen!* How we respond determines how we hear Jesus telling his disciples, *So I send you.* And so I ask you, even as I ask myself, *So what?* What is next? Where are you living as one who know *He is risen?* What is your *So what?*