

Preached by Dr. Carl A. Rush
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church
Alexandria, VA 22310
April 4, 2010
Easter Sunday

Luke 24:13–35
1 Corinthians 15:19–26

LANGUAGE STRETCHED BEYOND ITS LIMITS

Christ is Risen! Now instinctively you should want to reply, “He is Risen indeed.”

Christ is Risen!
He is Risen, indeed.

We feel that we are saying words that have meaning; but, if we’re honest, these are words that we don’t fully comprehend. This is the reason Paul is writing the church in Corinth, and why we are sharing his retelling of the gospel today. Yes, the gospel accounts that we share are powerful. Mark, when he just said, “He rose from the dead,” is overwhelming in setting the tone and sharing the message.

When we say, “He is Risen, indeed,” we are saying the same thing we repeat in the Apostles’ Creed: “I believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.” It is important on Easter to understand what resurrection faith includes. Part of what we are saying, we really believe. We believe our human bodies are destined for eternal glorification. Paul was teaching the importance of treating our bodies with a sacred reverence and respect.

See, the people in Corinth had come to believe with the Greeks and Romans that the body was just a tomb in which their spirit was trapped. But Jesus has a bodily resurrection from the dead and this reality begins for us now. Already in this life, our eternal destiny begins.

Now sometimes we are taught or mistakenly believe that because of the resurrection, we have an eternal quality to our beings. Nothing can be farther from the truth. It is only because of Jesus that we have any hope of living in eternity. Now I know that this is pretty heavy stuff for a bright Easter morning; but Paul finds it necessary to re-teach this lesson, because the Corinthians are living as if this life did not matter compared to the life that would come later—after death—and in the sweet by and by, that heavenly existence. Life in the body is not profoundly evil. It is not a tomb in which our spirit seeks to escape. No, we can’t be caught like these Corinthians in being so spiritual that we forget that Jesus has honored our vulnerability. He has honored our bodies with his divinity. Let me put this another way. Let me be so bold as to restate what Paul is saying.

Because God honors us with a body, we count it a privilege to honor God with our lives. I borrow those words from Stephanie Paulsell’s meditation, *Honoring the Body*. What we are confessing in this service, and in all of our living of faith, is so profound that I often find the need to go to others and look for images that help. I hope you all like Flannery O’Connor. Her writings are a gift to everyone who seeks to proclaim the gospel. In fact, much of what I say from this pulpit is touched by her wisdom.

Ms. O'Connor wrote one funny story that relates to what we have read today. The story is about two 14-year-old girls who are attending Catholic school in the south. The two girls have given each other nicknames: Temple I and Temple II. They gave each other these nicknames after one of the older nuns had offered them some sage advice. She was instructing what they were to do if a young man should behave in an ungentlemanly manner in the back seat of an automobile. She told them to say, "Stop, sir. I am a temple of the Holy Ghost." And according to the sister, those words would put everything in place and put an end to the ungentlemanly behavior.

Can you imagine? I think those words might work. "Stop, sir. I am a temple of the Holy Ghost." Well, one day, Temple I and Temple II were teasing one another about their new identity when a 12-year-old girl in their school overheard them and repeated what they were saying. "I am a temple of the Holy Ghost." It pleased her to think of herself in this way. O'Conner said it made this girl feel like somebody had given her a present.

Imagine if we could instill in our children the conviction that because God has honored us with a body, we in turn can honor God with our lives. This is why God is calling to believe and live with respect not only for ourselves, but for others. And this is how we know that it is an act of faith when we resist dishonoring another person. Because the one we mistreat is an embodiment of what God has created: a person that God has infused with the Holy Spirit.

Easter-resurrection faith means victory over death and it means victory over all the forces that seek to destroy community. If we could see ourselves as the Holy Spirit, then we will begin, one day, to see others in the same way. Thank goodness we can say, "Christ is Risen! He is Risen, indeed."

And we are not just affirming deliverance from this life into a permanent kind of post-mortem bliss, but we are affirming the importance of living with the highest regard for one another. Christ is Risen! This is the strongest affirmation of our humanity; and beyond that, "Christ is Risen, indeed!" is the resurrection faith that is truth of God's love for us, because it is lived out in our love for one another.

He is Risen, indeed! Hallelujah!